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# Janine Is French

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LLOYD ALEXANDER

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Janine Is French

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# CHAPTER 1

Janine, my wife, is French. Slight and brunette, she walks with the tiny, hurried steps of Parisian women. On a crowded street, I can distinguish her at any distance by this quick, decisive gait that makes her seem to be following an invisible thread. She is fascinated by Indians, by animals, and Martians. She collects rusty nails for good luck and hoards them in a little wicker basket. She detests ice cream and ice cubes. She is small but determined; I have seen her demolish a chimney, using a bread knife and a tack hammer. The only period in my life when I believed I understood Janine completely was in Paris, a dozen years ago, before I had known her very long.

I met Janine for the first time during the summer following the war, on the Boulevard Haussmann, in the worst rainstorm of the season. She was on her way home from shopping, and I offered her a lift in my army jeep. At that moment she was too wet for conversation, only expressing her thanks in a breathless, inhaled "*merci.*" Nevertheless, I

obtained permission to call on her. We were married three months later.

In France, marriage is still contracted under the Napoleonic Code, and the husband is specified as master of the house, with the right and privilege to select the place of residence, to control the budget, and to exercise final authority in all domestic matters. During my life with Janine, I admit that my claim to the benefits of this arrangement has been for the most part theoretical.

However, in those early days I did make some semblance of running the nearest thing we had to a household. Janine had been living with her cousin Yolande in a small apartment near the Place de l'Etoile; I had quarters in a dormitory of the Fondation des Etats-Unis and had been going to school at the Sorbonne. The Fondation was not only several miles from Janine's apartment but was occupied entirely by American soldiers—hardly a workable situation for getting married. I took it on myself to find a place of our own. After days of inquiring at one hotel and apartment house after the other, the best I could discover was a *maison de rendezvous.*

Paris still had a soft spot for lovers' indiscretions, and even in the midst of a housing shortage there were a number of these *maisons,* quiet and well furnished, where rooms could be rented at any hour of the day or night, usually for relatively short periods. When I told the concierge that I would like to lease one of her rooms for several months, perhaps longer, she gave me a look of wonder and admiration.

With embarrassment I explained that the situation was not as it appeared. Janine and I were married and looking for a place to live until I finished my term at the university. The concierge turned to me indignantly:

"*Ah, non, monsieur, ce n'est pas juste!* It is not fair for

a married couple to occupy one apartment so long when there are so many people who are not even engaged!"

After further discussion combined with bribery, the concierge agreed to rent us a room for two weeks. There Janine and I enjoyed an atmosphere of luxurious wickedness while I continued looking for a more permanent address. But the time passed quickly and I was unsuccessful. It was Janine who tracked down a small hotel room near the Jardin du Luxembourg.

I gave her credit for being able to locate anything at all, but the room was drafty, uncomfortable, and expensive. We also had mice. Janine was not afraid of them; she even made a mouse house from an empty ration carton. Some of the mice grew quite tame, and often, when we returned to our room after supper, we would find one or two of them waiting in the box. Janine fed them with scraps saved from our meal, and we all spent many jolly evenings together.

Mornings, Janine and I left the hotel: I to go to school, Janine to spend the day with her cousin, whose apartment was less frigid than our room. Crossing the great frosted square of the Luxembourg, Janine would skip ahead of me, her hair flying from under her woolen cap, to look at the statuary or whistle at the pigeons.

Even with the mice and drafts, I had a certain attachment for the hotel. But winter was growing sharper, and food more scarce. I welcomed the army's notification that Janine could sail for the United States with a shipload of other war brides. If she did not take the opportunity now, the army could not guarantee when she might have transportation. I suggested that the only sensible thing was for her to go on ahead of me and stay with my parents in Philadelphia until I finished at the Sorbonne.

Janine disagreed violently. As a last resort I fell back on

the Napoleonic Code. Janine acquiesced—but it was only her veneration for Napoleon that allowed her to be shipped off alone to a country of foreigners and total strangers.

In any case, the deed was done. With half a dozen suitcases and a book of English grammar, Janine and I reported to the Gare Saint-Lazare on an icy February morning. I followed the train along the platform while Janine rubbed a clear space on her compartment window so that I would know she was waving at me.

This was the last I was to see of Janine for several months, and my first communication was a message from my parents advising that she had arrived safely. A few days later I received a letter from Janine herself:

"Dear Rainette,

"Everything is fine, and your parents are very nice even though they do not speak French. But I have found my own ways. I simply go straight ahead and do what I want; I am sure that pleases them because it saves the bother of a dictionary.

"Your father is so droll with his *chapeau melon* and cane. He looks almost like a Frenchman except that he is so serious all the time. In the evenings when he comes home, he swallows his dinner as fast as he can, then goes off in a corner and starts turning the pages of his newspaper very rapidly. I believe he is interested in *la bourse,* but what he reads does not seem to make him rejoice, because he breathes heavily and shakes his head.

"And your poor mother! How she labors in the kitchen! As soon as I can arrange myself I think it would be nice if I undertook the cooking. I am sure your mother would get along better if I helped her. At the moment she is being most polite. When I en-

tered the kitchen she seemed afraid I would tire myself and kept taking the pots and pans out of my hands. However, I am sure she will realize soon it is all for her own good and we will be very happy.

"I am getting a lot to eat, Rainette. There is so much food, more than I have seen since the war. I do not like any of it, but there is certainly a lot. In the morning when I come downstairs your father is there at the table with funny things in front of him. They are square and fried, soft and gray inside. Your mother called them scraps and said they are the national dish of Philadelphia. But when I found the word in my dictionary I decided I did not want any. And then there is the bottle of tomato sauce you must smack on the bottom. It is not too bad when it comes out.

"After I did not eat any scraps your mother showed me a bowl of round things. They must have been dry and not fresh at all, because they made a formidable noise when she poured milk on them.

"All of these things your parents offered me to eat; but I was wise enough not to.

"I hear your mother preparing supper so I shall stop here, Rainette, and go downstairs. Tomorrow I shall have more news.

*"Je t'embrasse mille fois!*
*"Ta petite femme,*
"JANINE"

"PS: Impossible to believe there is hot water at all hours. Later I am going to fill a big tub!"

I read Janine's letter with the feelings of a man who has got on a roller coaster and changed his mind. I realized I should have briefed her thoroughly about Philadelphia—its

scrapple and my parents. For years my father had operated a brokerage office in town. For him, casual dress consisted of a black derby, pearl-gray spats, a black chesterfield and a cane; he was the least droll person I knew. In our house his reading of the financial page was a sacred ritual that had never been interrupted. True, he did not rejoice in what he read, but he had no desire to be cheered up.

My mother ran her kitchen as a private domain in which no other human was allowed while meals were being prepared. Janine's reaction to scrapple, catsup, and packaged cereal were minor compared to the rest of it. Hastily I wrote that I was pleased things had gone so well but suggesting it might be wiser, for the time being, to leave my father to his paper and my mother to her own cooking.

A few days later I received a letter from my mother. She had little news beyond mentioning how glad she was to meet Janine. She assured me everything would be all right; assured me, in fact, several times throughout the letter with a desperate insistence. A paragraph of home news concluded:

". . . and the plasterer is sure he can fix the ceiling so we shall hardly notice the difference."

While I puzzled over this, another letter arrived from Janine:

> "Adorable Rainette!
>
> "I am so happy this affair of the bathtub is terminated. Once or twice I did go to sleep with the water running, but you know how much I love a bath up to my neck and I promise in future to take only showers.
>
> "Rainette, I have been thinking about something I do not understand, and which makes me very unhappy. Why do all the houses in this country have such little windows? They are so narrow and they slide up and

down. They are not at all the right kind of windows for one to sit and look out. One would think the Americans would know better than to have this kind of windows.

"Even if I could sit in the window, there is not much to see. Except in the morning at eight o'clock. Then all the automobiles come out and they are so long the whole street is tangled up with them. Then at night they all come back again like beetles.

"You never said a word about those windows, Rainette, and it was very unjust of you to keep it a secret.

"Your parents have arranged the second floor of the house for us. They call it the third floor, but of course it is really the second. I tried to explain that in France we do not count the ground floor, but they did not understand what I meant. At least it gives me a corner where I can be alone with my thoughts. It is all right except, again, for the windows. I will have to put new ones in later.

"I do not mean to complain, Rainette, but I am lonely and miss you and Paris. But you will soon be here, and we can decide what to do.

*"Avec mille baisers,*
"JANINE"

I had expected some discouragement from Janine but was sure she would get used to Philadelphia in a little while. However, over the next few weeks her letters were gloomy. She had little to do, no friends of her own, and whatever novelties Philadelphia offered did nothing to cheer her up. English remained a mystery to her and by early spring things had not improved—as she pointed out:

"Dear Rainette,

"Here I am looking out of the little windows again. It has been a terrible day, even though the sun was shining most of the time.

"Why is it, Rainette, whenever you meet Americans and they find out you are French the first thing they say is, '*Parlez-vous français?*' Of course I speak French. How would they like it if I kept asking them whether they spoke English? After they ask me if I speak French, I tell them '*Oui*' and ask whether they speak French too. And always they put up their fingers and say, '*Un petit peu*'—only they don't say it right.

"What angers me is that I can understand their French, but they cannot understand my English. I have been trying to learn some phrases, and to give them a veritable American taste I employ some of the words I often hear you say when you are talking with your army friends. But when I say them, everybody puts on a strange expression and asks me to repeat them. Except your mother, who asks me not to repeat them. Yet I have heard you say them so often I cannot believe I mistake myself.

"This is not really what I meant to tell you, for I am very unhappy. It is nothing you have done, because you are not here and therefore I do not blame you. It is the fault of that terrible Mrs. I don't know what her name is that your parents invited to speak French with me. I was so glad at first, but it turned out she was a French girl thirty years ago. She, too, married an American soldier in the first war and let herself be trapped into coming here.

"Now she is very old. I realize there was nothing she could do about that, it is all a matter of time; but she has forgotten most of her French, and what she remem-

bers is with an American accent. And she is fat, with big necklaces, and we sat in the living room and she kept telling me that I would soon grow accustomed to it just as she did.

"Oh, Rainette, I do not want to stay in this country and get fat and forget my French. You must send for me right away, and we will live in Paris. I would much rather have my mice back again.

"Write to me immediately, Rainette, and tell me what we can do. Life is terrible.

"Your cheerful
"JANINE"

I answered by return mail, but none of my assurances did any good. Within a few days I received a short note:

"Dear Rainette,

"My mind is made up. I can no longer support the tiny windows and the scraps and getting fat and all the rest. Somehow I must find the money to buy a ticket and come back to Paris right away.

"*A bientôt,*
"*Ta petite femme,*
"JANINE"

I sent a cable telling Janine to do nothing until she heard from me. In the morning I booked passage on the next boat to the United States.

# CHAPTER 2

Under the heady influence of the Napoleonic Code plus the importance I naïvely attached to being a new husband and head of a household of two members, I was sure my arrival would settle everything; that Janine's complaints would evaporate, and the scraps and narrow windows be forgotten. My return produced the opposite effect.

Now that Janine had someone who could understand French, she expressed—with a fluency she had not used for several months—all her old objections with a number of new ones thrown in. She was convinced that when people spoke English in her presence, they were saying nasty things about her. She despised the climate. She liked seeing men with beards; there were dozens in Paris, so far she had not seen one in Philadelphia. She believed she would fall sick with some foreign disease and die in a strange land without ever speaking to her relations again.

On top of everything else, she did not like our living conditions. In our attic apartment there was still a confusion of old trunks, stacks of clothing, and disabled furniture. We

had a massive antique bed at one end of the room, a couple of overstuffed chairs, a lamp with a shade like a morning glory. To these, Janine added her own possessions: a number of linen sheets; a set of silverware, of which only the spoons remained; a strange-looking beaver coat she disliked and never wore but kept in case she should change her mind about it; dresses; lingerie; a carton of French patent medicine; a quantity of bent, rusty nails she collected as good luck charms.

As I looked over this profusion I could not really disagree with her. I had grown used to Paris without realizing it. Janine had told the truth. Even the windows were hopelessly narrow. Nevertheless, I tried to convince her that all would work out for the best—eventually. She paid no attention. Her decision was clear and firm. We would have to return to Paris.

I protested in vain. The Napoleonic Code crumbled under Janine's repeated assaults. Her back-to-Paris campaign was waged at all hours. In the middle of the night I would wake to find Janine sitting upright in bed.

"Rainette," she would ask, as soon as I was conscious enough to hear, "do you think we could get boat tickets next week?"

I soon gave up the fight. My heart was not in it. I believe, in those days, I missed Paris as much as Janine did. I agreed we should go back—but there was one argument neither Janine nor I could beat: money.

We would need money not only for transportation but for food and lodging until I found some way to earn a living. Even on the most economical budget, I calculated the venture would take much more than we had—since we had nothing at all. We realized there could be only one solution. We would have to save, little by little, until we accumulated enough.

The first step was to get an income. I had hoped to put most of my time to writing, but I knew that if we waited until I finished a best seller, we would be too decrepit to make the trip. I found an office job that paid enough to allow a small amount of savings each week. At my earning rate, I estimated we could look forward to seeing Paris again in about fifteen years.

Janine was more impatient. Originally thinking in terms of months, she had resigned herself to staying in Philadelphia for a year or so. In view of my salary, Janine decided that she too had better look for work.

The main problem was her lack of English. With my parents she had developed a system of signs and gestures that worked fairly well for day-to-day events; the scene at our dining room table could have been out of the dawn of civilization, for its reliance on sign language. But she could hardly keep a job when ordinary communication was impossible.

The study of English, which Janine had neglected since her arrival, started up with enthusiasm. She unearthed her grammar book from the bottom of a drawer, and we set aside an hour each evening for lessons.

The central character in Janine's book was an Englishman named John Smith. He appeared as a clerk, a sportsman, a customer in a shop, changing his occupation with each lesson. Despite his various jobs, Smith somehow managed to get away on long vacation trips. He invariably kicked up a row with hotel managers, pestering them about accommodations and service, demanding where he could find the elevator and lavatory, and asking for his lost baggage. In the restaurant, he ordered everything on the menu. He called for water, beer, wine, and five different kinds of dessert. Naturally he fell sick. His head hurt, his stomach hurt; he had chills and fever, a cold, a fainting spell. A

doctor had to be called. And the whole affair would start over again with changes in conjugation.

I didn't like Smith. He was much too demanding. On top of that, his pronunciation was transliterated into the broadest Oxford accent. He impressed me as a fraud and an upstart. I wanted to replace him with another book, but Janine wouldn't hear of it. She had become captivated by Smith. Although she understood little of what he said, the sketches illustrating his adventures fascinated her.

Janine, Smith, and I settled down to our daily lessons. I began by reading a passage aloud, Janine watching me, her eyes wide with amazement that I could speak such a difficult language so easily. After a time, as much as she tried to keep up her interest, she would weary of the English sounds and begin to fidget. First she perched on the arm of my chair and stared at me with such a baffled expression that I burst out laughing. Or she would float about the room, paying no attention until at last I threw Smith in a corner, and Janine and I conversed in that most beautiful and expressive of all languages, silence.

Some of my teaching did rub off, but in ways that astonished me. My explanations of grammar and vocabulary came back to me unrecognizably disguised.

When I studied philology, I had no true appreciation of how a word originating in one place could turn up in a different form somewhere else. The transformation of sounds from one type to another had always been an academic principle I never really understood. Janine brought it to life for me.

Janine was a walking Grimm's Law. I do not believe there was a single phase in the history of the development of the English language she overlooked. With Janine, English would go in one way and come out as it might have been at some remote period. The old familiar speech underwent

something deeper than a sea change. The consonants became plastic and ambiguous; the vowels took on new and startling tones, dropped out from where they belonged and insinuated themselves into the crevices of some other word, always in the most unexpected places.

Janine made English her personal possession, a toy to be played with, not taken seriously. She made the language stand on its head and do tricks. By the time she had compressed it, reversed it, squeezed, lacerated, hog-tied, and branded it, it was more than tamed. It was cowed.

She so far surpassed the philologists in their wildest speculations that I realized I was privileged to witness the birth of a new theory: Janine's Law.

Unlike Grimm's, Janine's Law involved no logic and was constantly being amended. In general, it centered on a few basic patterns.

First, the switch-around in which words such as "fountain pen" and "milk bottle" became "the pen-fountain" and "the bottle-milk." This was one of the simpler aspects of Janine's Law, easily grasped and interpreted. More startling and original were Janine's views on grammar.

There were no limits to the variations and changes she could ring on straightforward sentences. The past tense annoyed her; she used it reluctantly and with contempt. Phrases including "do," "did," and so on, dropped like pinches of spice into the syntactical stew. Thus Janine was able to concoct such statements as "Did I had it?" or "Was I done it?" A combination of the foregoing might result in a remark:

"Didn't you had put the bottle-milk empty on the porch front? Isn't it, then I will!"

Janine's Law did not overlook pronunciation of individual words. I cannot say Janine spoke with a typical French accent; here again her pronunciations were more

personal. "Point" was pronounced something like "pwoint," but long and drawn out, with peculiar stress on the "pwoi" sound. "The same thing" became "the sem thang;" other words with "inch" became, for example, "anch," "panch," and so on.

"Frizzing to deaf" was a phrase Janine acquired during our first winter, accompanying it with the gesture of covering her ears with her hands. At first, when I would see her come into the house, breathless from throwing snowballs at miscellaneous targets in the back yard, and make this gesture, I thought she intended to indicate that her ears were cold. I discovered later she had understood the words to mean the weather was cold enough to make you lose your hearing.

"Crow" and "owl" gave her particular difficulty; the first she pronounced to rhyme with "how," the second to rhyme with "hole." "Poor krau," Janine said one cold afternoon when she observed a lone blackbird perched on a limb outside the window. She said it with such emphasis that to me, somehow, the mispronunciation only sharpened the bird's chilly solitude; and at night the distant sound of hooting became much more weird and strange when Janine put a finger to her lips and said, "Lissin . . . a hole!"

Fabrication of words was also a prerogative under Janine's Law. Unable to think of the English, she would squeeze a French term into the mold. "I can do it *sole* by myself" and the "electric ampoule" (when she learned the correct word, Janine called it a "light blub") were easily understood in context. But her greatest triumph came one evening at dinner when she wanted to comment on the stew. "Delishes," she said, looked around vaguely, hesitated a moment, and went on, "it's . . . it's very moilus!"

This one baffled me, but when I asked her to translate back into French, I understood she had tried to come to

grips with *moelleux*, meaning mellow and full of marrow. Moilus was the nearest she could come. To me it was a splendid word, with overtones of "moist," "oily" and "luscious," a word of which Lewis Carroll could have been proud. It has remained in Janine's vocabulary and by extension has come to mean something especially agreeable.

Word fabrication also worked in reverse, for Janine's Law was flexible enough to stretch in any direction. After her bath, when Janine applied a new cologne to her neck, she invited, "*Tiens*, Rainette, smell-*moi!*" Being sold an inferior item, she advised me indignantly, "*Je vais retourner au* store *et demander mon* money-back!"

Almost without realizing it, I gradually fell into her style of speech. It soon became perfectly natural for me to talk about kraus and holes, vegetabills, tabes and shares. At night we began to thank about going to slip; we would wek up in the morning and come downstairs for a very moilus brekfist.

Some of our friends were concerned about this and suggested I should make a greater effort to help Janine correct her speech. But English in Janine's style was much more interesting, with charm of its own; as for the idea of making her change it, I samply could not see the pwoint.

The only defender of the language turned out to be my father, although as a defender he gave more the impression of a last survivor in a crumbling fortress. When Janine spoke, he tried to help her with a series of muttered asides which only slowed down the conversation. For the first time in his life, my father cut short his reading of the financial page and occupied himself with Janine's lessons.

Something was wrong with my method, he decided, and offered to conduct the lessons himself. I handed him Mr. Smith but he waved it away. He needed no books; his inherent knowledge of the language was sufficient.

I gave up my position as teacher reluctantly and with the same feelings as a parent sending a child to school. My father began immediately after supper, adjusting his pince-nez and clearing his throat to explain the construction of an English sentence. He drew diagrams on sheets of paper, read the phrase, and made Janine repeat it after him. She made few mistakes under his supervision. My father nodded with satisfaction and told Janine they would resume the next evening.

Janine turned gleefully to me. "*Tu vois,* Rainette, hadn't I did it right!"

My father never repeated his early success. The further he went with grammar, the more knotty it became. He expounded rules until my head swam with them. If I ventured to help, it only made matters worse, and he accused me of being a distracting influence.

He decided that lessons should be conducted in private so that Janine could seriously buckle down to work. Each night after the study hour, she would emerge from the third-floor living room, a look of triumph on her face, followed by my father, who presented every symptom of exhaustion.

Janine said little about her progress and my father made no comment. When I asked how she was getting along, she replied, "*Pas mal.*" Although I noticed no change in her English, my father no longer interrupted her even when she committed the worst howlers. Instead, he stared into space with a remote, studious air.

One night when Janine and I were in our apartment, I heard my father stumbling around on the floor below. There was a muffled sound as if he had stubbed his toe, followed by a word I had never heard him speak until that moment.

It was the famous French word which has become more a national monument than an item of vocabulary: the word which General Cambronne threw in the teeth of the British

when asked to surrender at Waterloo. The French refer to it affectionately as the "*mot de Cambronne*" or "*les cinq lettres.*" My father voiced it with such vigor that I turned to Janine in amazement.

"*Ah, oui,* Rainette," she said sleepily. "We have *finalement* gave up the Anglish. Your father says I will soon know enough to get work anywhere I want. So I teach him Franch instead. He is a *monsieur très intelligent* and learns rapidly. So that's all for the best, didn't it?"

# CHAPTER 3

Janine's campaign to find a job ran into difficulties from the beginning. Secretarial work was out of the question. If Janine's spoken English was unusual, her spelling was impossible. "House" under her hand became "eauce" and "door" was truncated to "dor." Besides, she disliked typewriters because they made too much racket. Although she had no specific trade, selling offered a possibility, and Janine decided to apply at one of the department stores in town.

I helped her fill out the application at home, but Janine's attitude was far from that of a hopeful employee.

"Is it their affair to know all my relatives?" she said. "Do they thank I ave a *méchant caractère? Tiens,* let them rat a letter to Paris if it is so important."

The line calling for the name of a person to be notified in case of emergency made her pause. "Rainette," she asked, "why do they want that? Do you thank it's dangerous to work in a store?"

I assured her it was only a formality; Janine had nothing to fear. I could not say the same for the store.

Janine began work as an apprentice salesgirl in the perfume department. The management must have chosen her to provide a continental atmosphere for the customers. I am sure she did, but there were other angles the store overlooked. Janine's conception of the monetary system was still rudimentary. She understood dollars and cents, but her idea of intermediate small change was shaky. She could not always be sure whether a nickel was worth more than a dime—or why it should be.

"All these buffaloes and Andians, and President Roosevelt and the Statue of Liberty . . . I don't see the pwoint," Janine said. "But it doesn't matter, Rainette. If I don't remember, I just give the change in pennies."

Janine's sales policy was also at variance with that of the store. "When these peep come to buy *le parfum*," Janine told me after her first day at work, "I tell them the truth. If I don't thank it smells good, I tell them so. And the prices! Too high! This makes them very happy, and sometimes they don't buy anything at all."

But the business of filling out sales slips and making carbon copies was what finally put a damper on the job. The store was touchy about keeping records, and Janine claimed that paperwork made her head swim. On top of everything else, she could not operate the cash register without getting her fingers pinched. At the end of the week, Janine and the store agreed to part company.

Her next target was a manufacturer of wedding dresses. But the machines stitched so quickly that Janine feared she would be sewn up in a cloud of organdy. She also tried painting lampshades and assembling Venetian blinds. None of these jobs lasted more than a few days, and Janine usually came home in tears.

"I cannot understand what they tell me," she cried, "and

when I do, it makes no sense. Oh, Rainette, I do want to work and save money. But it's terribill!"

Janine decided to make a strategic withdrawal and improve her English before trying anything else. Since she was not contributing directly to the back-to-Paris fund, she made up for it by inaugurating an increased economy drive.

As far as I could see, our income was already budgeted down as far as possible. At maximum saving, Paris still lay far in the future. Janine was convinced we were being too extravagant. Each payday we organized ourselves into a committee and gathered in our apartment for a revised financial report.

Janine, solemn, in a white smock she always wore when important projects were afoot, sat at my table and calculated expenditures for the fiscal week. We deducted our fixed overhead—payment of our share of the household food, my lunch and carfare; then the real business meeting began.

"Now, Rainette," Janine would say, taking up a sheet of paper and a pencil. I was more interested in watching her write down the figures; I was charmed by the long, drooping French 2's, the barred 7's, and ungainly 5's. But Janine did not let my attention wander from the main point: how to cut down.

First she introduced the matter of the telephone. My portion of the family bill included half a dozen calls to friends in the city. Janine ruled these toll calls excessive. "I thank, Rainette," she declared, "we do much better ratting letters. It costs less and we can say more. Or maybe *cartes postales,* because there really isn't that much news."

I promised to lay in a stock of post cards for all future communications. Next subject on Janine's agenda was clothing—or, as she called it, "closes." This was my opportunity to put in a bid for anything I might need within the

next two weeks. If I neglected to do this, Janine closed the budget book with the callousness of a supply sergeant, and I could expect no disbursements until the next fiscal week.

Although Janine could do little about ordinary working costs, one area of expenses she determined to eliminate completely: doctor's bills. "We ave got to stay in good health, Rainette," she said. "I am not concern of myself because I never get sick; but it would be just like you to do a thing like that."

This was warning enough for me, knowing Janine's methods of treating illness. I had always been prone to colds and sore throats and in Paris Janine practiced her own version of home medicine. Like the French in general, Janine believed that all sickness stemmed from a disordered liver. Whether I sneezed, had laryngitis, or a pain in the toe, she opened a special box of liver pills that looked like nothing so much as cyanide pellets. She forced me to swallow these as a matter of principle before considering any further treatment. By the time my liver stopped convulsing, I had forgotten what had been bothering me.

To finish off the cure, Janine would wind a sock around my neck—by preference, a sock recently worn. In the toe she would insert several buds of garlic and attach the whole business to my neck with yards of gauze winding. None of this did me much good but at least it kept visitors away and reduced the possibilities of contagion.

While I realized what lay in store for an invalid under Janine's care, my father was not so fortunate. Janine's anti-doctor drive originated for our benefit, but her basic sense of frugality was outraged when my father came down with a bad summer cold. Always an ardent patient, my father insisted on having the doctor.

"Not once, Rainette," Janine told me in a horrified whis-

per, "but already two times the doctor has been here. Do you account to yourself what that must cost?"

I tried to point out that it was something like a hobby for my father. Janine shook her head. "It is not proper to spend so much just for a little cole. Instead of penicillin and all those medicines your mother could use that money more usefully. And these American doctors! I was in the room when he came. He examined your father with not a word about his liver, not even to blink at it. *Eh bien*, I arrange myself to cure your father before that doctor again puts his nose in the door."

I did my best to persuade Janine that my father was really beyond help, that sooner or later the cold would have to go away. I told her that French liver pills and American drugs would produce a chemical reaction that would ruin him permanently. This was the only favor I could do for him; the rest was out of my hands.

Janine put on her official white smock, snatched some garlic from the kitchen, a sock from the laundry and, before my father realized what was happening, wrapped them around his neck.

"Tomorrow," she told him, "it will all be over."

Squeezed by the sock and stifled by the aroma of garlic, my father could only agree with Janine.

Next day, to Janine's surprise and indignation, he was no better. During the night, according to my mother, he had violently unwound the sock-and-garlic combination, claiming he was beginning to smell like a tossed salad. His cold had gone into his chest and by evening he was demanding the doctor again.

"*Ridicule!*" Janine said. "If he had left the garlic in place he would be well. Now it is too late for that. *N'importe*, we try something else. This time we apply *les ventouses*."

This was a new word to me, and I was afraid to ask what it meant. My dictionary defined it as "cupping" but I had no clue as to what Janine intended to do.

My mother was too puzzled to refuse when Janine asked for a set of glasses, preferably small. Janine examined the china closet, declining water tumblers but giving a cry of triumph when she discovered half a dozen punch cups.

Setting the cups on a tray, she then wound puffs of absorbent cotton on match stems. "Now I commence," she said.

We followed her into the sickroom. My father thought we were carrying him some refreshments. His disappointment turned to alarm when Janine ordered him to remove his pajama top.

"Don't be worry," Janine soothed, "you won't realize what we do."

Feebly protesting, my father rolled over on his stomach. Like a maître d'hôtel preparing a platter of flaming crêpes suzette, Janine lit one of the swabs and poked it into a punch cup. When the rim was hot enough she removed the smoldering cotton and smacked the cup against my father's back. He gave a muffled yell; but my mother, fascinated by Janine's spectacular treatment, held his head tightly against the pillow.

Janine heated each cup in turn and set it on my father's quivering skin. To my surprise, the cups did not fall off. Vacuum held them tightly in place. After all six had been put down, my mother released her grip, and my father straightened up. When he caught sight of himself in the mirror, he began to thrash wildly in bed. He believed that Janine was bleeding him and had put the cups there as if she were tapping a maple tree.

"Don't bounce," Janine said. "Soon all the bad blood is pulled out and your cold goes away."

While my father groaned, Janine pulled off the cups one by one. Bumps like enormous mosquito bites rose quickly where the cups had been.

"You see," Janine said, "already they start to turn black. This is a good sign, and now you can put back your shirt."

Janine gathered up her utensils and wished my father a cheerful good night. She paused a moment at the door. "If you don't fill better tomorrow, I try to find those little animals . . . *les sangsues* . . . how do you call them, Rainette?"

"Leeches," I said.

My father gasped. Janine gently closed the door.

Next morning my father was up ahead of us all. He was ashen-faced and shaky but he dressed at top speed, gulped some coffee, and was out of the house before Janine could ask about his health.

"And so you see, Rainette," Janine said, "the French medicine works better than all those chemicals. Yesterday he was a sick man; today he cannot wait to go to his office."

I nodded and suppressed a sneeze. I was coming down with a cold myself, but I had sense enough not to admit it.

# CHAPTER 4

Janine's austerity program allowed few necessities and fewer luxuries—this last, however, including sight-seeing and an occasional movie. I believed that the more Janine saw of Philadelphia, the better she would like it. But she was more interested in feeding the squirrels and pigeons of Independence Square than she was in studying Colonial architecture. The Liberty Bell only puzzled her.

"*C'est beau,*" Janine said, "*mais c'est* broken." The history of the famous crack left her unsatisfied. "I understand all that, Rainette. *Quand même,* we have the bells in Paris much older that never cracked. I don't see why the Americans could not make something more durable."

In Rittenhouse Square the statues of the lions, the frog, and the goat delighted her, but rows of exclusive town houses made no sense.

"They have no courtyard," Janine said. "And where does the concierge stay?"

She refused to believe me when I told her that the closest thing to a concierge America could offer was a janitor.

"But who delivers the mail and sweeps the steps? And looks after visitors and opens the door at night?" She shook her head in pity for the unfortunate inhabitants.

All I could show Janine only disillusioned her more. The absence of café terraces convinced her she was quite right in wanting to go back to Paris. But the area around Logan Square, with its fountains and long vistas of trees, made Janine stop short.

"Now, Rainette, this looks like Paris," she said. "It reminds me of something . . ."

When I pointed out that this section of the Parkway was modeled after the Place d'Italie, Janine looked at me in amazement—then burst into tears.

"A copy! I knew there was some rizzon I lacked it. But it's still not the real one. Oh, Rainette, I want to go home!"

Janine sat down on the edge of a fountain, heedless of the spray soaking her shoes, and wept loudly. I kept my hands in my pockets so that passers-by would not think I was beating her, and tried to console her as much as I could. Finally she stopped and blew her nose.

"When I miss Paris too much, Rainette," she said, "I shall come here."

We walked slowly back toward City Hall. I did not dare call Janine's attention to the old building's French architectural style. Nor did I mention the Rodin Museum. We had seen enough of France in Philadelphia for the time being.

In addition to sight-seeing, another inexpensive amusement was reading the comic strips. Here was one aspect of American life that appealed to her immediately. Janine never missed the daily comic section, and the big colorful sheets of Sunday funnies were her favorites. She would lie on her stomach like a child, the pages spread over the floor

in front of her, and laboriously decipher every panel. The Sunday funnies became a ritual on our third floor, and it was my duty to remain on call as a translator.

Most of the strips were new to her, but she recognized a few old friends.

"*Tiens,* Rainette," she cried gleefully, "*voilà Mathurin! Et Brutus!*"

I couldn't imagine what she was talking about until I saw that "Mathurin" was Popeye and "Brutus" his arch-enemy Bluto. "Mickey," pronounced French style, was easy to guess. "Blondine" was Blondie masquerading as a French *femme de ménage.* "*Jacques de la Jungle*" was Jungle Jim.

While Janine grasped the adventure stories easily, it took a little time for her to learn basic comic conventions: that comic-strip housewives invariably set pies in open windows; that tramps or small boys were always waiting to steal the pies; that comic-strip children had an insatiable appetite for cookies; and women, a propensity for buying fantastic hats. Most of the cartoon characters lived in peculiar shacks, farms, or suburban developments the like of which Janine had never seen. She never quite understood Jiggs' love of corned beef and cabbage, or the basis of Maggie's objection to it.

"*Le Petit Abner*" mystified her because she could not understand the text. "Are they spikking a foreign language, Rainette?" Janine asked.

I explained that *Le Petit Abner, Marguerite Mai* and the other hillbillies (*Guillaumes les montagnards*) who lived in a certain area of the United States spoke with accents that might correspond to the French Auvergnat. In reality the American *montagnards* did not necessarily have pigs in the house (something Janine found plausible enough), and the girls did not walk around in tattered

bikinis. By the time I finished, my exposition had begun to sound more like a sociological lecture, and Janine was fast losing interest.

"*Alors,*" Janine said with disappointment, "this Dagpetch does not *vraiment* exist? *Dommage,* I would have lacked to mek a visit."

Our budget allowed for a movie now and then, and Janine went gladly—not so much to improve her English as for the "*maïs pop.*" Corn was a vegetable the French fed to animals, and the first time my mother served it Janine looked aghast.

"*Mon dieu,* Rainette," she whispered, "are we so poor? Even in the Occupation we never ate *le maïs.*"

But the French, after all, are famous for tolerating barbaric eating habits. Janine picked up an ear of corn and bit into it. After I showed her how to eat the kernels and not the cob, she admitted "*Ce n'est pas mauvais,*" and asked for a second helping.

Popcorn interested her still more, and in the movies she always bought a big cardboard box of it. While she munched, I provided a running translation of the dialogue. During a dramatic sequence I was as busy as a sports announcer and usually drew a barrage of shushing that echoed all around us. The cool glances we received after the lights went up distressed Janine and she could not understand why American audiences frowned so much.

Janine came into her own whenever we went to a French film. While the rest of the audience lay enslaved to the meager subtitles, Janine wept, giggled, laughed, or gasped. I am sure the other spectators were convinced the film was much better than they could imagine—and very likely doubted that they were really getting their money's worth.

In my boyhood, sneaking down town to the burlesque show was the height of wickedness. During the week, a few of us saved out enough of our lunch money or allowances to buy seats in the balcony. No girls were invited; this was men's work and we were filled with the delicious fear that the show might be raided—or that for once the star strip-teaser would really take something off. Neither event, unfortunately, occurred. But the price of the ticket was well worth the sophistication we acquired.

I told Janine about these expeditions and my impression of them made it easy to present myself as a rogue and man-about-town. I wanted to demonstrate that Philadelphia had its share of night life and, under the influence of nostalgia, I offered to take Janine to the burlesque.

In my high school days there were three burlesque theaters in Philadelphia. Now only one remained, a soot-grimed building that looked as if it had just survived a fire. To my remembrance it had been bigger and more glittering. The photo-murals in the lobby were discolored and I was convinced they had not been changed since my last visit. The siren faces that once captivated me had a wall-eyed look. Janine, expecting the elegance of the Folies Bergère, asked if we were in the right place.

Inside, the candy-butchers were hard at work, hawking the lucky boxes and chocolate bars. "*Qu'est-ce que c'est que le Crackairjake?*" Janine asked.

When she learned it was a variety of popcorn she had never tasted, Janine began waving at the candy-butcher. "Is it true, Rainette, they give the prizes lack they say?"

I told her that the boxes were indeed lucky—lucky to the extent you got anything at all—but before I could finish, Jane had bought three. "It is very economical," she said. "You need an electric razor and a wrist-clock. And I would lack the camera."

She dumped the candied popcorn into my lap and plunged her hands to the bottom of the boxes. The prizes were a whistle, a compass that didn't work, and a sailor made of painted tin. Janine stared at these items in dismay:

"But where is the clock? Where is the razor? And *surtout*, where is my camera?"

She began waving at the candy-butcher again—this time with an expression I had come to recognize as the "*je veux mon* money-back" look.

Luckily the show started then. After a few moments I was sorry it had. This time our seats were close to the front and for once I wished they were farther back. The chorus that had rejoiced my youth could not compare to the beach scenes of any French summer resort. The jokes fell heavily on my ears. I tried to translate them for Janine but my heart was not in it. Worse, the devilish picture I had painted of my boyhood came back to plague me and I felt like a man who has suddenly lost a reputation.

The star of the show was billed as a genuine Cherokee princess, but I had to admit to Janine that she was hardly representative of Indian culture in America. While I meditated on the subject of *sic transit gloria* strip-tease, I heard a strange sound next to me. The words were familiar, but the accent was pure Janine:

"Tek eet uff!"

I looked at her in amazement. "Wasn't that right?" she asked. I told her it was perfect.

"*Le streap-tiz*," Janine said, "*c'est très amusant*. But why does the Indian princess now disappear?"

The show, I said, was over.

"*La fin?*" Janine asked disappointedly.

"*La fin*," I said.

We went home then. My parents were still awake when we arrived, and my mother, who had somehow got the

impression we had gone to the movies, asked Janine what she had seen.

"Nekkid leddies," Janine answered, "but not rilly very nekkid."

My father suddenly roused himself. "Where, for God's sake, did you take that girl?"

Without giving Janine a chance to answer, I hustled her up to the apartment.

Janine had carried the Crackairjake prizes with her. After all, she pointed out, she had paid for them. She stored them in her wicker basket along with the rusty nails.

"And so, Rainette," she said, "it was all *très intéressant*. Even the Crackairjake. *Dommage* it ended so soon. In Paris it would just be the commencement."

# CHAPTER 5

The burlesque show, however mild, had repercussions. First, it brought Janine's attention to another phenomenon.

"*Eh bien,*" she said, "with these *femmes américaines,* one may truly say there is a world on the balcony!"

I knew enough French slang to recognize Janine's retranslation of "*Il y a du monde au balcon.*" She was not referring to a social group gathered on a projecting gallery, but to the amplitude of the feminine bosom.

Janine had often remarked on the height of American girls. "In France, we have the short legs but the thin arms. But here it is a country of long legs and wide arms." The burlesque show started her on a new train of thought.

Janine, slight of figure (and endowed with what dressmakers call a "French bust"), had never made it a subject of conversation in Paris; now I found myself caught up in her discovery of the American bosom.

"I do not think these balconies are *chic,*" Janine said. "But *naturellement,* the American men must prefer them. *Eh bien, chacun à son goût.*" Something crossed her mind,

and she gave me a peculiar, searching look. "And you, Rainette! Now that you have come back . . ."

She lapsed into silence, then turned and sniffed indignantly. "I know *exactement* what you are saying to yourself."

The world on the balcony occupied an ever greater percentage of Janine's thoughts. Whether it was coincidence, fate, or Janine herself who led us there, we rarely found a place on the subway opposite posters for chewing gum or government bonds. Instead, we sat directly facing multicolor announcements of intimate apparel. Studying them, Janine's expression was both combative and wistful—with a slight edge given to the former. Theaters seemed to be showing nothing but Marilyn Monroe pictures and we attended every one. "*Ça alors,*" Janine would whisper, eyes fixed on the screen. "There is *vraiment* a balcony."

The American balcony even followed us home. I had the impression that every industry in the country was running a beauty contest. Miss Pasteurized Cheese, Miss Dry Beer and Miss Florida Citrus smiled at us from the newspaper columns. Each of these balconies carried an exceptionally large population. Magazines fell open, magically, to the latest fashions in undergarments.

Advertising was widespread in Paris and nothing new to Janine. Previously she had found fault only with the billboards along the highways. Janine called them "bull boards," and in this case I did not try to correct her pronunciation. Now she took issue with advertising everywhere. The singing commercials irritated her. "At first," Janine said, "one thinks they are going to sing a song, with all that tooting and hitting of xylophones, and *enfin* it arrives that they are selling you soap." She turned them off whenever she suspected one was beginning. Magazine advertising annoyed her even more.

"These names are *ridicules*," she said, "they are all things like Fizz and Whiz, or else I cannot pronounce them. And these secret materials with the numbers—how can we tell what they are? I do not want secret things in my dentifrice paste, unless they ask me before."

I suspected Janine's attitude was a smoke screen for something else. "And these," she went on, "all these women dreaming without their clothes . . . or else they make the tragedy when one is flat . . . Soon I will have shame to go outside."

Her look was still combative and wistful, but the balance had shifted to the latter.

Her dislike of advertising—of the balcony type in particular—did not keep her from becoming a customer. She and my mother had gone shopping, and Janine had drifted away by herself for a few minutes. She brought a small package to our apartment.

"It is very confusing," she began. "At first, I could not remember the name in English, so I asked for a support-throat—*un soutien-gorge*. The salesleddy gave me such a funny regard, until I pointed, *tu sais* . . . But the word she said means in French 'the arm' . . . *'le bras'* . . . In any case, when I told her the size, she gave me one like the tent . . ."

If Janine had told the salesgirl her size in the metric system, I could imagine how it had fitted. Janine's size-ten dress, American style, would have been almost a thirty on the French scale.

"So she asked for my letter," Janine went on, "and I did not comprehend any better. How should I know what is the 'A' and 'B' and 'C'? *Quand même*, it was *finalement* arranged."

Janine tried on her new purchase. But she turned away from the mirror, frowning. "It is as I suspected," she said.

"All of these dreaming pictures are the fraud. No matter what they say, these American support-throats do not aid."

I assured Janine, in all possible ways, that balconies were essentially a matter of opinion. Next day, when I came home from work, I found Janine sitting in the armchair, a magazine on her lap. It took not a moment for me to realize the change in her.

Janine, smiling, made no comment. Since we had not been married long, I wondered if there were things I had not understood.

Janine's measurements, which hardly coincided with those of Marilyn Monroe or Miss Pasteurized Cheese, were rapidly approaching them—in one direction.

When I asked whether she felt ill or had been in an accident, Janine evaded the question. Finally I learned the truth.

"Oh, Rainette," Janine wailed, "when I took the support-throat back to the store, the woman sold me these to put in. And I wanted them, Rainette, because of *les femmes américaines* . . . and I thought it would be better if I looked like them . . . but now when I look like them, I do not look like myself. . . .

"Oh, Rainette," Janine said tearfully, "are you sure it will make no difference if other people have more world on the balcony and I have practically no one at all!"

In addition to balconies, the burlesque might also have suggested to Janine that American women needed more clothing. Whatever the source, her new inspiration followed shortly after our visit there. One evening Janine put on her white smock, reserved for occasions of domestic importance, and perched on the edge of my worktable.

"Rainette," she began, "I have been thanking."

Still too much of a newlywed to attach sinister meaning

to such a remark, I innocently asked what she had in mind.

"Rainette," Janine said, "who are the most great—*les plus grands*—dressmakers in the world?"

I granted that the French enjoyed that reputation.

"And is it not true that women spend much money on *la mode?*"

By this point, my suspicions were aroused, but I could only agree that Janine was correct so far.

"*Voilà!* Now it will no longer be necessary for one to do that. *Ecoute,* Rainette, all these famous French closes—they are fabricated by Frenchwomen, *n'est-ce pas?* But I am a Frenchwoman and I am already here in America. Do you see how much trouble and expense that saves?"

Before I could demolish Janine's line of reasoning, she switched into French, immediately putting me at a disadvantage, and raced on to her conclusion:

She was going into the dressmaking business. On a small scale at first, of course. But later—Janine swept her arm expansively—a shop of her own, a fortune, enough to make six trips to Paris. I was interested to know what role I might play in all this.

"You can make the sign," Janine said, "because you are good at drawing. Naturally, we do not need any yet because I intend to do all the work here for a little while. But when we do get the shop I guarantee to let you make such a nice sign. . . . And then you can keep the accounts . . . and for the rest of the time, you can write your books. Won't it be a wonderful life, Rainette?"

I admitted the French had an inherent sense of style—almost as great as their ability to deal with the human liver, but I also suggested that Janine had no actual experience in dressmaking, let alone *haute couture.* And how did she propose to transform our apartment into Philadelphia's Parisian style center?

Janine was not listening to me. Her eyes had the same look that Marshal Foch must have displayed at the Marne. "*T'en fais pas,* Rainette," Janine said. "Tomorrow I begin my preparations."

Janine's preparations were elementary but extensive. And they could not have come at a worse time. Late in the summer, my aunt came to live with us; and a few weeks after that my sister, her husband, son, and their full-grown Irish setter joined the household. To this day I puzzle over how we were able to squeeze everyone in. The spare room Janine had counted on for her work was fully occupied.

There was only one place for the dressmaking establishment. Since the sleeping area of our apartment was already overcrowded, Janine sacrificed our miniature living room and my working quarters. From the cellar, she brought an old enamel-topped table for cutting and laying out patterns; and a rickety ironing board my mother had never got around to throwing away. The boxes I used for manuscripts Janine now appropriated for tape measures, spools of thread, and scissors; the arm of our overstuffed chair blossomed into a gigantic cactus, spiked with pins and needles.

As a neophyte magazine salesman signs up his relatives, so Janine first applied her talents to my family. She suddenly noticed that my mother's hems needed fixing; next it was my aunt's turn to have alterations made in some dresses which, until then, had fitted perfectly; and my sister's clothes received a thorough once-over. For all this, Janine generously made no charge. My mother recruited the paying clientele among her friends and Janine's first customer was a Mrs. Lowenguth, an old acquaintance of the family.

From my childhood I remembered Mrs. Lowenguth as large, overpoweringly scented, and given to pinching my cheeks. She had changed little. While she did not dare

pinch my cheeks after all these years, she made up for it by pinching Janine's.

"Now, Rainette," Janine said, "we are going to work, so you must left us alone for a while."

"No peeking," Mrs. Lowenguth tittered. I gave her my solemn promise, gathered my papers, and went downstairs. While Janine attended to Mrs. Lowenguth's hem, I shared a corner of the dining-room table with my nephew, who was making a model airplane, and tried to keep my manuscript out of the glue.

Later that night, when Mrs. Lowenguth finally went home and I finished scraping balsa wood from an unfinished chapter, I trudged upstairs to be greeted by a gleeful Janine:

"You see, Rainette, how I progress? *Cette grande dame* —she will come back soon."

I was glad to hear Mrs. Lowenguth was so pleased with the work, but Janine frowned slightly:

"*Eh bien*, it might not be entirely *comme ça*. I thank I might have made the mistake when I sewed up her dress."

Janine showed typical French skill with needle and scissors—but I soon began to wish she had none. As the number of customers increased, our apartment began to be filled with dresses hung from every available spot—on the doorknob, along the door jamb, and on the handles of the bureau—so that I could hardly walk by without knocking something down. Janine, for her part, was delighted.

"It won't be long, Rainette. I wonder what is a good name for the shop?"

On a pure cost-accounting basis, Janine's operations made little profit. Since most of the customers were old friends of my mother, they usually made a social occasion of their visit to Janine, and stayed for lunch; as far as I could cal-

culate it, it cost more to feed them than what they spent for dress alterations.

"You always seek *des ennuis*," Janine said. "First, your mother would have to entertain them anyway. And if they do eat a lot, so much the better. Because then they gain weight and have to come back for another fitting!"

This was all very well from Janine's point of view, and I could not seriously object to the afternoon visits. The customers who came during the evenings or weekends when I was working were the ones who turned my schedule into a shambles. I could go nowhere in the house without running into Mrs. Lowenguth or some other matron in a state of undress.

"Don't be worry," Janine said, "leddies *en déshabille*—especially the older ones—sometimes like to be embarrassed."

I protested that I was more likely to be the embarrassed one.

"*Quel puritain!*" Janine sighed.

However, for my sake, she hung a drapery between my working space and the rest of the apartment. When customers were about, I took refuge in this tentlike affair. But no matter how much advance warning I gave, I continued to blunder upon shapes of white or pink that appeared out of nowhere, gasped, and vanished. I saw Janine's clients so often in negligee that I had trouble recognizing them fully dressed.

At this time, another woman entered my life. Although headless, armless and legless, her shape was feminine and her personality malevolent. Janine discovered her one day in the classified ads of the newspaper, the reading of which had become one of her favorite pastimes. She leafed through

them page by page, and when she did not have enough time during the day, she carried them along to finish in bed.

"*Oui,* Rainette," she admitted, "at least your American journals are superior to the French."

I was pleased that Janine recognized our high standards of newspaper publishing.

"*Eh bien,*" she said, "I did not mean *exactement* that. These journals are much bigger, and the paper is of better quality. For these standards you talk about, I cannot say. But I see immediately these journals are *formidable* when one has need to wrap a fish."

Janine had extended her interest from the funnies to the rest of the newspaper, but in the beginning she found it more perplexing than informative. "What is this, Rainette? GIANTS NIX PHILS IN GRAND SLAM! *Alors,* I comprehend the giants—the huge ogres, but this neex and slam . . . and here, LIFER LOSES PLEA, D.A. VICTOR! *Evidemment,* this Monsieur D.A. Victor has lost something, that much is clear, but the rest of it has no sense."

I did my best to explain the principles of headline writing and Janine had no sooner begun to master them than she stumbled over the hurdles of the classified ads.

"Now here is a strange word, Rainette. *Pvut!*" She pointed a finger at a line of small type. "And these others . . . *lidge,* and *herse, bzit uffr, exp ness! Ah, ça!* The advertisements were already *difficile.* But to read these journals one must have the special dictionary!

"It astonishes me," she said. "All of these things for sale. In France, we would keep them *toujours,* until they fall apart and then we would fix them. But here it is the occupation to buy things and debarrass oneself of them immediately."

Still, she pored over the notices of secondhand ukuleles,

fur coats, refrigerators, old encyclopedias, shotguns, and play pens. For Janine, it was as good as a trip to the store, with no need for speaking English to the clerk.

It was during one such perusal of the classified ads that Janine stopped and pointed excitedly to a listing.

"*Tiens*, Rainette," she cried, "a doomy! It is a pvut party, for sale chip!"

Evidently a dressmaker's dummy was all Janine needed to put Dior out of business. I borrowed my parents' car and we drove out to buy the mannequin. The owner was a housewife who had decided to give up sewing. Janine got along splendidly with her, investigating the sewing room and storing up ideas for future reference.

I carried the dummy outside and put it in the back of the car. It was not easy; the long pedestal took up most of the room, so that I had to open a window and let the mannequin poke out like a corpus delicti.

The woman accompanied Janine to the car and wished her good luck with her new purchase.

"She's been almost one of the family," she said, then bent forward and whispered confidentially, "I even had a name for her. I called her Judy."

We drove away, with Judy thumping around in the rear. Every few minutes Janine turned to look proudly at her new acquisition. Had I known Judy's diabolical personality at the time, I would have turned and sped back; or abandoned her on a street corner.

I should have had some hint from the beginning, when I helped Janine install Judy in the apartment. The dummy, covered with brown fabric, was hollow. Inside was an arrangement of slides, slots, and wing nuts; by making adjustments here and there, various parts of Judy's anatomy could be advanced or retracted, to match the dress size desired. By pulling out and expanding the upper portion, Judy re-

sembled Mae West. Further adjustments could give her an hourglass figure from the Gay Nineties. It was all perfectly simple and straightforward, but while I delved into the inner workings like a surgeon performing an appendectomy, I pinched my thumb on one of the wing nuts. I pulled out my hand as if she had bitten me.

"You see, Rainette," Janine said, "you understand nothing of these affairs. Judy does not like to be handled that way."

Judy and I were never good friends after that. Aside from being bitten, I had ample reason to dislike her.

First was the matter of space. Judy, on her pedestal, took up more room than an average human. I had the impression that I always had to walk around her, and that no matter where I went she was in the way. For a while, Janine stored her behind the apartment door. As a result, when I entered, I invariably knocked her over. Other times, when Janine was fitting dresses, she left Judy in the middle of the floor. Thinking of something else and neglecting to turn on the lights, I would suddenly find myself confronted with Judy's torso—always enough to give me a severe shock.

At my insistence, Janine covered Judy with a sheet whenever the dummy was not actually being used. The effect was ghastly. Shrouded in white, alone in a corner of the apartment, Judy stood as a silent, eerie specter. Janine herself began to feel uneasy, so we dispensed with the sheet.

One of Judy's nastiest habits was mimicry. Because of her mechanical adjustments, she could duplicate anybody's figure. With a flowered dress pinned around her, one shoulder slightly higher than the other, and bosom extended as far as possible, she gave an exact imitation of Mrs. Lowenguth.

I was haunted successively by these weird facsimiles of Janine's customers—I could never tell whom I might find

in the apartment. At night, working, I could feel them looking over my shoulder. Undressing for bed was even more uncomfortable.

By contrast, Janine and Judy became the best of friends. Janine flitted around the dummy, pinning, measuring, remeasuring, humming to herself. With Janine, Judy blossomed into a party girl, a welcome guest to the fitting sessions.

"Rainette, you are jealous of Judy," Janine giggled when I told her she was spending entirely too much time on her dressmaking. "And if Judy and I do not work hard, none of us can go to Paris."

The idea of actually taking Judy with us had never entered my mind. I realized Janine was perfectly capable of doing so. I envisioned the rest of my life spent as the short leg of a triangle.

"Judy would like Paris very much," Janine said.

She went back to her measuring, and I withdrew to my tent. A combination of Judy, Mrs. Lowenguth, and her friends was beginning to make me short-tempered. I did not see how Janine's dressmaking could ever be a factor in getting us back to Paris. Nor was Judy even sturdy enough to serve as a raft.

As a desperate measure, I suggested banishing Judy to the cellar.

"The cellar?" Janine cried indignantly. "How can you want to exile a poor, harmless doomy?"

"Napoleon was exiled," I said.

"But he came back," Janine countered.

"And Waterloo?" I reminded her.

"You Americans," Janine said, "are all the sem."

From then on, I declared open war on Judy. Instead of walking around her, I would pick her up—not too gently—and set her down heavily out of my way; if she fell from

her rickety pedestal, which she often did, I made a point of leaving her where she lay. Then, Janine would run from her sewing to pick up Judy and offer consolation. The final battle came when I seized Judy to thrust her in a corner and stabbed my hand on a needle in her waist.

Disregarding this treacherous and painful assault, I picked up Judy bodily and carried her down the stairs. Janine hurried out. "Where are you taking her?"

"*Judy au cellar!*" I called over my shoulder.

Trying to assume the proper Bastille Day attitude, I lost my footing; Judy and I began a giddy waltz down the steps. We ended on the landing. For myself, I could foresee interesting bruises. Judy was hopelessly cracked down the center.

Janine clattered down the stairs. Ignoring my scraped shins and less obvious injuries, she tried to pick up the remains of Judy. "Wicked Rainette," she said. "You have ruined Mrs. Lowenguth. My mother was right. All men are brutes."

Judy, beyond repair, was consigned to the rubbish barrel. From a window Janine watched tearfully while the trashmen hoisted her up and dropped her ignominiously into the truck.

"It is all your fault, Rainette," Janine wailed. "You have hurt my fillings. Besides, suppose it hadn't been Mrs. Lowenguth? Suppose it had been a model of me?"

"I would have recognized it," I said. "You would have been unmistakable."

Janine sniffed and smiled. "You would not really have tried to throw me down the stairs?" Finally she accepted my assurances. "I suppose, Rainette, you did not really mean to hurt Judy. I'll forgave you—this time."

Nevertheless, at our financial meeting, Janine judged me guilty of negligence and sentenced me to buy another

dummy out of my own funds. I reluctantly postponed the suit I had been saving for and instead of the single-breasted tweed, brought home a new mannequin—a contraption of wire mesh and stainless steel, totally unlike Judy, abstract, placid, entirely without personality.

Janine never took a fancy to the replacement, and their relationship was strictly on a business level. Janine eventually persuaded my sister to lend part of her own room as a sewing center. Upstairs, things were much quieter. There was no real need for me to stay behind my tent, but by then I had grown used to it. Walking through the apartment I almost missed Judy. Sometimes I thought of her with a certain regret. But not often.

# CHAPTER 6

Janine's business continued throughout the autumn. And even though her project of opening a shop never materialized, and the amount of money earned only came to a few dollars a week, I realized that her work kept Janine from being too homesick too often. She took her dressmaking as seriously as if she were running a giant corporation, wrote out detailed lists of materials she needed, and her shopping trips were treated as major purchasing expeditions. Usually we went in town together; but one Saturday late in October, when I was particularly busy, Janine made the journey alone. She came back much earlier than she had planned and burst into the apartment:

"Rainette," she cried, "what are those terribill thangs?"

Experience had taught me that Janine's questions usually came at the end of a long inner monologue whose subject, while perfectly obvious to her, was not necessarily revealed to me. It always took a certain amount of questioning to discover what she was talking about.

"What things?" I asked.

"In the stores—all of a sudden today they have masks with terrible regards . . . *des sorcières,* what you call whiches . . . and skellettes . . . and pumpkins with faces. I don't thank I want to go there any more, Rainette."

I began to laugh. "It's only Halloween," I said.

Janine looked at me with distress. "Hollow Wing?"

I told her that Halloween was much like *La Toussaint* in France and started to describe our own Mischief Night and the principle of trick or treat. But she interrupted.

"You min," she said, "that you let strangers menace you and come into the house like masked bandits?"

"They're only children," I said, "just out begging."

"Baggers? *Des mendiants?*" Janine said indignantly. "To thank of that . . . in America, the richest country in the world, you have a special day to send little children bagging. Ah, you Americans. *Vous êtes tous sans coeur.* No wonder *ces pauvres enfants* wear masks, to cover their faces from shame."

I told her that this wasn't really the idea and to see for herself. We said no more about it, but as Halloween approached, her uneasiness grew. On the night itself, Janine watched perplexed while my mother filled bowls with gingersnaps, popcorn, and candies. My nephew was going out dressed as a devil, and the sight of him in his costume did nothing to bolster Janine's confidence. The first beggars—a crowd of goblins, pirates, black cats, and Frankenstein monsters—sent her rushing upstairs.

"*Les gangsters!*" she cried. "I don't like the Hollow Wing, Rainette, I don't thank it's very moilus at all."

It took several waves of beggars before she caught the spirit of the thing. By the time my nephew was ready with his bag, Janine's eyes were bright, and the most grisly skele-

ton only made her laugh. "Rainette," she whispered, "do you thank . . ." She hesitated a moment. "Wooden it be fun, Rainette . . ."

This time I could guess what she had in mind. "All right," I said, "you can dress up too."

She clapped her hands and ran to the apartment.

Under the technical guidance of my nephew, she improvised a satisfactory disguise: an old sheet with eye holes cut into it and a most unfrightening skull drawn in crayon around them. I declined an invitation to go along as an assistant phantom and watched from the window while Janine, hand in hand with my nephew, set out to terrorize the neighborhood.

In front of the house a roving band of children greeted Janine with delight. As they surrounded her, I lost sight of her for a moment. She was hardly taller than the others. But I recognized her again when the little crowd swept her along. She was the only ghost I had ever seen who walked with a Parisian accent.

After nearly two hours, as I began to wonder whether she had been carried off by authentic hobgoblins, Janine and her escort arrived, their bags filled to bursting.

"*Regarde-moi ça!*" she called triumphantly. "We bagged more than anybody!" Hurrying into the house, she began emptying her loot on the dining-room table. In addition to gingersnaps and candy corn, a handful of pennies spilled out, plus marshmallows, lollipops, pretzels, several bananas, and nearly a pound of peanuts; somewhere she had also acquired a liverwurst sandwich wrapped in wax paper.

"This Hollow Wing," Janine said, "is a little skerry, but also economical." She unwound the sheet and looked at it with disappointment. "But my costume," she said, "it was no good. The others—nobody could guess even when they

asked them questions. They asked me questions, too . . . how old I was and where I went to school, and where I lived. I gave all the wrong answers, Rainette, but they knew me right away."

She had hardly recovered from Halloween before Thanksgiving decorations went up in the shops. This time I was not caught unaware. Continuing Janine's education in the ways of Americans, I tried to combine an explanation of Thanksgiving with a history lesson. I told her about the Pilgrims and Massachusetts Colony, the first Thanksgiving, and even found an old history book showing the scene.

She studied it carefully. "But those with the feathers—they are Andians, *non*?"

"Yes," I said, "the Indians were invited, too."

"They comported themselves well? And *le scalping*?"

I assured her that everyone had agreed there would be no scalping until after dessert.

"And where are the Andians now?"

"On reservations," I said. "After a lot of fighting, the government gave them land reserved just for the tribes."

"But when this picture was taken," Janine said, pointing at the book, "the Andians were there first, in that place Machooses?"

Not only in New England, I explained, but everywhere in the United States.

"*Alors*," she said, "this is a country of Andians, just as I suspected. *Quand même*," she went on, "the Andians are *très sympathique*. And if they promised to have no scalpings, I thank I would like to meet a tribe."

Thanksgiving dinner gave Janine an idea of the lengths to which my mother could go in setting a table. Fascinated, she could not leave the kitchen. She prodded the turkey, and poked her fingers into the pumpkins. The mince pies puzzled her a little. ("Mince? That means 'thin,' doesn't

it?") But after her earlier experience with corn, she was prepared to expect any kind of barbaric foods. Her only reaction to sweet potatoes (*les pommes de terre douces*) and cranberries (*la sauce de canneberge*) was to eat them.

Afterward, I noticed a look of vague discomfort on Janine's face and wondered if she had indigestion.

"No, Rainette," she said. "Everything was perfectly moilus. But I keep thanking about those Andians all alone on their reservations. And no one invites them any more. Next time, Rainette, you must promise: if we are still here, we will not have the Thanksgiving without at least one Andian."

She was silent for a while, looking into space as if listening to distant tom-toms.

"*Tu sais,*" she said at last, "the Andians made a big mistake. When those Pilgrims arrived, the Andians should have put them on reservations *tout de suite.* Poor Andians. Things would have been different if I had been there."

After Thanksgiving, Janine and I went in town nearly every Saturday. Her eyes widened at the glittering festoons and enormous Christmas trees that had just been put up in the department stores. Her dark hair bobbed up and down in front of me, and she slipped far ahead of me into the crowds of shoppers until I feared she would be swallowed up and lost.

I had never seen anyone thread his way through a crowd as Janine did. "You Americans walk too slowly," she said. "You should learn to circulate better."

When she was not window shopping, her progress on a busy street followed the pattern of a complex and rapid dance: a step forward, a quick side step, forward again—this time like a slender shadow passing between two indignant shoppers—then, at the end of the block, a pirouette

to make sure that I was still there, while I picked my way hopelessly through the passers-by.

"*Tiens!*" Janine said when the street corners were occupied by bearded, red-suited figures. "These must be your *Père Noël* . . . the Santa Claus. But there are so many! A veritable army wherever one regards. But where is the little man with the sticks?"

"The sticks?"

"Oui, *le Bonhomme Janvier* . . . the little one who follows Père Noël with sticks for those who have not comported themselves correctly. *Ah, ça alors!* You Americans are very lucky. You do not have *le Bonhomme Janvier* but only the Santa Claus!"

Janine and I resolved to give Christmas presents only to my family. There were enough relatives already in the house to make this a fairly expensive proposition. We promised not to give each other gifts. "Because, Rainette," Janine said, "in France grownups only give *les étrennes* at New Year's; and since we are not in France, we don't even have to do that. So you and I, Rainette, we will wait until we are in Paris again."

We did not have a white Christmas that year; the air was clear and bitter cold. On Christmas Eve, my nephew Peter was finally forced into his room while the rest of us stayed up to trim the tree. But Janine, appointing herself supervisor of tinsel and ornaments, more than made up for his absence. Watching her face and hearing her laughter when the packages were brought out, I believed for a moment that she had come into existence only for Christmas and would disappear as soon as it ended.

Toward midnight, when we sat down to an American-style *réveillon*, with cookies and milk instead of onion soup, Janine fell silent. I looked at her beside me at the table, and she smiled slightly.

"Do you hear the bells, Rainette?"

"No," I said. Outside, the night was still.

"The bells of Notre Dame? Neither do I, Rainette. We are too far."

We went to our third floor then. Janine had hung a holly wreath on the bedstead; even the doomy had a festoon of tinsel ("Because, Rainette, *après tout*, it is Christmas for everybody").

Whatever homesickness had touched her seemed to have lifted. Janine did not stop chattering even as she climbed into bed.

"So you see, Rainette, we did perfectly right. Tomorrow we open the packages, and it will be just as much fun even if we don't have special presents for each other. It's all the sem thang."

There was a fiendish glint in Janine's eyes when I put my head on the pillow. Had it not been Christmas, I might have guessed that the object I felt beneath my ear was a fake candy box with a papier-mâché caterpillar ready to spring out. Janine stifled her laughter as I sat up abruptly.

"*Joyeux Noël*," Janine said as I tore open the wrappings and discovered a pair of cuff links.

"It's a surprise," she added. "You don't have the right kind of shirts, but I didn't thank of that until it was too late." She gave me a cautious look. "I know I broke my promise, Rainette, but you will definitely need the cuff links if you ever do get a shirt that fits them."

I scolded her as much as possible, but she paid no attention. Her final subject of the evening was stockings: "In France," she said drowsily, "we put out the shoes at Christmas. But I see now that stockings are much better because they can hold more. You Americans, *quand même*, are the most practical . . ."

Her voice trailed off and she closed her eyes. I waited un-

til I was certain she was asleep. Then I walked quietly to my worktable where I had hidden the necklace I secretly bought in defiance of Janine's decree and with utter disregard for the back-to-Paris fund.

I started to look through the bureau, trying to find a stocking to hang up—until I realized that I would really be in trouble if the package caused a runner. I slid the drawer shut and picked up one of her shoes, well worn, mended and remended; a broken lacing spliced together in a careful knot. In my hand it looked as small as a child's, and the Christmas box, with its tissue wrapping and fancy bow, could barely fit inside.

Janine still slept, her lips slightly parted and a faint flush on her cheeks. I put the shoe and package on the bureau where she would be sure to see it in the morning.

"*Joyeux Noël,*" I said.

Janine had made the acquaintance of Philadelphia cream cheese and Philadelphia scrapple—but she had not undergone a complete Philadelphia winter. The snow we had hoped for on Christmas perversely came about six weeks later when we had begun to think of spring. The first day, seeing the whole neighborhood blanketed in white, Janine clapped her hands:

"It's lovely, Rainette! The American snow is just as good as the French."

In the afternoon we bundled up in scarves and boots and made a gigantic snow man in the back yard. Janine molded snowballs and tossed them at everything within range, including myself. When she began frizzing to deaf, we stamped back into the house, our gloves soaked and Janine's ears turning bright red. She borrowed my nephew's sled and took belly whoppers in the frozen street.

A few days of winter sports were enough. As the snow

gave way to slush, the whole area looked as if it had been washed in a tide of gray soup. Janine grew tired of bouncing around on the sled, and the snow man began to resemble the Hunchback of Notre Dame.

"That was fun," she said. "Now, when does it go away?"

It did not go away; nor did it really stay. The following weeks dragged in a limbo of sleet, of rain that turned to snow and snow that turned to rain. The mornings were sallow, the nights impregnated with a frigid, penetrating dampness that seemed to enter one's bones by osmosis. As a Philadelphian born and bred, I had resigned myself to my heritage. Janine took it as a conspiracy of the elements to make her life miserable. In defense of Philadelphia weather, I reminded her that Parisian winters were almost as disagreeable.

"*Peut-être,*" Janine granted. "But at least in Paris I am at home."

In April, the bad weather really started. There was not a day when we dared venture outside without overshoes and umbrellas. The trees showed not the slightest trace of green; what few buds we could find looked as if they had gone on strike.

"There is no spring in this country," Janine moaned. "In Paris we would already be sitting on the terraces. Even if they had terraces here you would have to wear an umbrella with the water which falls you down the neck!"

In addition to the atmospheric gloom, that year Janine fell victim to one of her most severe attacks of homesickness. Evenings, she sat hunched in the armchair, silently studying the souvenir post cards until it was time for bed. Or else she would drop the pictures to the floor and go to stare wordlessly out of the window. Janine had always been slight, but for a little while she had lost the gaunt look of the Occupation years. Now her weight fell constantly, and

even the clothes she had brought from Paris seemed a size too large.

The dressmaking business was abandoned. With one excuse or another, Janine put off Mrs. Lowenguth and the other customers. Judy's replacement stood idle, a half-finished dress pinned around it.

As in the first days, Janine would waken during the night and sit motionless in the dark. Although I heard no sound, when I touched her face I knew she had been crying.

When I came home one day in mid-April, my mother asked whether Janine had gone to meet me at the office. She had vaguely mentioned something about going in town, then quickly left the house. That was in the afternoon and it was already seven o'clock. Even though rain was pouring down, she had taken no umbrella. Upstairs her topcoat still hung in the closet.

My mother and sister had already telephoned everyone they knew, and I made call after call to our own friends with an equal lack of results. Janine had disappeared.

About an hour later, while I was trying to decide whether to call the police or get in touch with the hospitals myself, she came in. She was soaked and frozen, her teeth chattered, and her whole body shook. Without even taking time to ask where she had been, I half carried her upstairs and wrapped the bedclothes around her. When the doctor came, she was sobbing too much to speak.

He examined her as thoroughly as he could. She was feverish, and it was likely that she was starting pneumonia, not to mention a bad state of nerves. He gave her an injection that would carry her through until he could see her in the morning, and a sedative to let her get a little sleep. For once I would have welcomed Janine's comments about American doctors and their ignorance of the liver.

I sat up the rest of the night. Even with the sedative, she

was restless for several hours. By three o'clock she seemed quieter, but I did not go to bed for fear of disturbing her. A little before dawn, Janine began to stir again. She opened her eyes.

"What happened, Rainette? I was looking for you."

I went to the side of the bed. She tried to sit up. "Is it still raining? It was a terrible day, and I was so unhappy. Do you remember the Place d'Italie? Not the one in Paris, but here, where we went during the summer? I wanted to go there. I said when I got too homesick I would go there, because I was sure it would make me feel better. Only I couldn't find it and I couldn't remember the name. All I knew was that it looked like Place d'Italie, but when I asked people they couldn't understand me.

"Then I wanted to come back, but I got lost on those streetcars; then I tried to find your office, but I could not do this either. By that time it was so late I did not know what to do and I had used up all my money for the streetcars.

"It never stopped raining, and I could not stop crying, because I did not know where I was. When I asked a woman, she was finally someone who understood what I meant. We got on a bus, and she went most of the way and showed me how to do the rest, and even paid the driver. But she never told me her name, and I do not remember if I thanked her."

Janine began to cry again. "I want to go home, to my home. Oh, Rainette, it is too long, too long."

# CHAPTER 7

Janine recovered faster than I. By the end of the week she was well enough to put a garlic-flavored sock around her neck and give it complete credit for the cure. For my part, I was still worried. Whatever other qualities it might have, garlic was no prescription for Janine's homesickness.

Paris was still distant but, as a temporary measure, I considered renting a place of our own. Even though Janine and my relatives got on well together, I thought it might do her good to get away from the bathroom waiting list and our crowded dining room.

Janine did not agree. "I am not bother by the queues," she said. "They are not so bad as what we have in front of a bakery."

Besides, she pointed out, if we undertook to pay higher rent we would be defeating our own purpose; the expense of a separate apartment would leave nothing to be put aside for our trip.

We dropped the apartment idea for the moment. But I

was still concerned about Janine. Her bouts with homesickness did not last too long at a stretch. Yet, no matter how she tried to disguise it, I knew she was unhappy. Since her illness, her weight had dropped seriously—even by feminine standards—and she wept easily. I feared she was on the way to a nervous breakdown.

Most of the people we knew were going to psychotherapists; it seemed I could hardly talk to anyone without learning they were passing several hours a week on the analyst's couch. They even appeared eager to spend the money. Any treatment that made patients cheerful while extracting cash from them must be truly remarkable. By doing some expert budget juggling, I calculated that Janine could manage somehow to get a few psychotherapeutic sessions, at least on a limited short-term basis.

She looked at me in horror when I suggested this.

"*Un psychiatre?* Another kind of American doctor? Out of the question, Rainette. We have enough to occupy us already. Besides, I do not want things attached to my head *comme une espèce de* lampshade."

I assured Janine that no psychiatrist would consider doing anything of the sort to her. All she needed to do was talk, which should not be difficult.

"*Eh bien,* Rainette, if you seriously thank I will expend the money for such a thing, you are the one to have the head examined."

I let the subject drop then, planning to bring it up at a more auspicious time. A few weeks passed and the moment had still not arrived. Finally, to my amazement, Janine herself reopened the question. We had gone to see a movie about psychiatrists, and the hero was one of her favorite actors. On the way home she said with vexation:

"Rainette, why did you not tell me about all this before? This *psychoanalyse* is most interesting, if those things really

happen like they do *dans le cinéma*. And everyone was having such a good time."

I couldn't guarantee that she would be analyzed by a matinee idol, and I had no idea whether it could appropriately be called fun. I did insist that it was worth a try and might even do her some good. Janine agreed to go, at least for a few sessions. One of our friends recommended a Dr. Morton, and she began with a once-a-week schedule. If, in a reasonable time, she found therapy helpful, we would try to keep on with it.

I had never been in a psychiatric consultation room, but Janine's post-facto accounts of her progress sometimes made me feel sorry I had mentioned psychotherapy—not for her sake, but for her doctor's.

The first visit, as she described it to me, was routine. He only asked her name, address, phone number, and general vital statistics.

"He also wanted to know my age, Rainette, but I told him it was none of his affair. Perhaps later, when I knew him better."

I asked what he was like and she shrugged:

"He sims all right, but it is difficult to say. He is bald, with glasses, and he doesn't speak French at all, which is *dommage*. He has fifty years and three children . . . and a wife, *naturellement*, but aside from that he did not have very much to say."

Next time, the therapy actually began—complete with classic couch.

"It was very narrow," Janine said, "and not comfortable at all. But he wanted me to lie down on it, so I did."

"Then what happened?" I asked.

"I went to slip. He was just sitting there behind his desk, doing nothing. I waited a long time for him to began, but he did not. So I closed my eyes and took a little nap. Then most of the hour was gone by the time he decided to say

something—and he still wanted me to pay so much as if I had been awake."

"The reason he did that," I told her, "was because he wanted you to do the talking. He isn't supposed to say anything unless he thinks it's necessary."

"*Eh bien,*" Janine said, "he will think twice about it next time. I did not pay him."

"You mean he didn't explain about . . ."

She waved her hand. "Oh, he explained when it was too late. But I told him he should have thought about all that before. It was the good lesson for him."

Although Dr. Morton's therapy was expensive, I felt sure he would soon earn every penny of it, and I did not envy him.

It was too soon to judge the effect of these visits on Janine, but it appeared that Dr. Morton, at least, was receiving a good indoctrination in French manners and customs. One aspect of his instruction concerned the French handshake.

Until I went to Paris I believed the traditional French greeting was a kiss on both cheeks. This may be true, but the French are essentially a nation of handshakers. They shake hands when they meet, when they leave, and several times in between. You shake hands with barbers, bartenders, shopkeepers, concierges, and anyone else who happens to be within reaching distance. A group of Frenchmen in a café begin by shaking hands all around, each one making sure he has grasped the hand of everyone else. If one of them leaves, the process is repeated. Even applying the law of permutations and combinations, I was never able to calculate the number of handshakes I exchanged in a given period.

Dr. Morton evidently did not realize this, for Janine's next report was delivered in a tone of high insult:

"When I got up to leave, Rainette, I started to shake

hands with him. And he told me it would not be necessary."

As far as I knew, there was no handshake rule in the code of ethics. But from what I had heard, some psychiatrists considered it detrimental to the doctor-patient relationship while others simply ignored it as a matter of practicality. I had no idea of Dr. Morton's professional opinion on handshaking, but Janine's was quite clear.

"I told him it was polite to shake hands, and I had been elevated that way. If he wanted to be impolite with everybody else, that was all right—but not with me. He was very apologetic after, and I suppose he did not know better. I hope I did not hurt his fillings, *mais* after all, Rainette, who is the patient?"

I seriously began to wonder, especially when Janine told me:

"*Ce pauvre docteur* Morton, he does not look well these days. So tired, and his complexion is not good. I suspect there is something that does not march with his liver. It must put him in a bad disposition. Today we were talking about my family, and I recounted all the stories about my brother Georges—you remember, the one who ran away to *l'Indo-Chine*? Ah, there was a *brave type*. And my sister Marcelle, and *la cousine* Yolande, and Maman and Papa. And the time that German officer tried to arrest me at the Métro for sticking out my tongue when he tried to talk to me. I told him I was French and would stick out my tongue whenever I wanted. He was so surprised he did not know what to say, and by the time he decided to call the police, I ran into the Métro. My mother was very upset when she found out, because she always told us it was dangerous to jump into a moving *voiture*.

"Then *le docteur* Morton began to ask whether my parents ever quarreled, or if I liked one better than the other —and if I sometimes did not like them at all. He asked me

if I ever had dreams about my father, and all kinds of questions *très intimes*. He must have a bad liver to think of things like that.

"After a while I got tired of it, so I told him *franchement* that if he wanted to analyze me this was all right, but to live my family out of it."

Although I was sure Dr. Morton had ample training and experience, I could only hope all this would not have a traumatic effect on him. Janine, on the other hand, was in better spirits than she had been for almost a year. She had regained her lost weight, her interest in dressmaking revived, and she only spoke of Paris eight or nine times a week. Early in summer, when the time came for Dr. Morton and Janine to decide whether to continue, she made her final report:

"I fill so sorry for that *pauvre homme*," Janine said. "For himself, he is not well at all. But on the subject of the treatment he is much optimistic. Today he said, 'Madame, when you first came to me I believed you need the help; now I comprehend that nobody is needing less the treatment psychiatric.' Then he wiped his head with a handkerchief and he looked very nervous. 'I do not usually take my vacation so soon,' he said, 'but this year I want to leave a little early.' If I ever wanted to talk to another doctor, he gave to me the name of someone he said was most good. Then we shook hands—this time he did not forget, you see.

"He was *très gentil*, and I am glad to see that *enfin* he tries to take care of himself. *Après tout*, he must be working so hard as anybody."

# CHAPTER 8

With Janine's excursion into psychotherapy at an end so soon we found ourselves that summer in the incredible situation of having money left over. My deficit financing had allowed for a longer course of treatments, and somehow I could not bring myself to put cash, which I was prepared to spend, back into the travel fund. The winter before had not been easy; and while Janine had fully recuperated I, for one, was exhausted. On top of everything else, I had a manuscript to finish, and I wished we could go away for a week so that I might work undisturbed and relaxed. It seemed to me that Dr. Morton had the right idea: I suggested to Janine that we should follow his example and take a vacation.

Only one thing troubled me. Our social life at home was fairly limited and Janine was not used to meeting crowds of strangers. At a resort I feared she would be uncomfortable in the midst of the usual throng of summer vacationers.

"Do not be worry, Rainette," she said, "the Americans still scare me a little, but I learn to scare them back."

We decided to try a few days at one of the quieter places, and I promised Janine we would go back home if she felt ill at ease. Usually she did not look forward to visiting, and I hoped the vacation would not prove too much of an ordeal for her.

Studying the resort folders, I saw that each one offered a splendid panorama and view of the lake (according to them, most of the Pocono Mountains were either covered with water or the resorts themselves were located side by side), superb cuisine, and sparkling entertainment. With all this magnificence at our disposal, we finally settled on the delights offered by a summer lodge called Mountain House. We sent in our reservations immediately. Early in July, we drove to the Poconos.

According to the folder, Mountain House was the area's most famous vacation wonderland. I had some difficulty finding it. None of the farm people I asked had ever heard of it and I began to think they had been bribed by competitors. By the end of the afternoon, certain that I had explored every secondary road in the vicinity, we finally came upon a wooden sign modestly pointing the way.

Mountain House itself lay at the end of a few hundred yards of pioneer trail. There must have been a great deal of traffic to create such deep ruts; at the time I could not tell whether they were caused by guests anxious to reach the place or in a hurry to get out of it. I chose the more optimistic interpretation. The lake was somewhat smaller and weedier than I expected, but there was unquestionably a good view of it. A few cabañas of striped canvas were set around a swimming pool. Some of the guests, dressed in shorts and Hawaiian shirts, played badminton, while a large Dalmatian dog ran about the court and barked at the shuttlecock.

We passed through a lobby filled with wicker chairs and

settees, and registered at a cubbyhole at the far end. Upstairs, our room was small and square, with a treacherous-looking double bed and a bureau even older than the one in our apartment.

As we unpacked, I began to regret the vacation idea. We were foolish, I decided, to spend money at Mountain House when we could be spending it in Paris some day. If the prospect of a week at Mountain House appalled me, I could imagine Janine's reaction. I was sorry I had persuaded her to come. We finished stowing our things in the aged bureau, and I created a desk by turning a drawer upside down.

"But you are not going to work all the time, Rainette?" Janine said.

I muttered that there didn't seem much else to do. My first impression of Mountain House had been far below my expectations. At least I thought I could salvage the week by putting in time on my manuscript.

Janine wanted to go exploring immediately, but the long ride had tired me. I proposed to take a nap while she investigated the premises. I fell asleep wondering how I could find ways of amusing her and making her stay as pleasant as possible.

About half an hour later I woke suddenly to the sound of an unmistakable voice. At first I thought Janine had fallen into something or been bitten by a horse. I ran to the window. Below, Janine was playing shuffleboard. I watched her heft the long pole, sight along the lines of the court, give a quick push—sending the disk skidding up the high-score section to knock her opponent out of the box.

She looked up, saw me at the window, and waved:

"Come down, Rainette, I am learning a new game."

I noticed that all of the shuffleboard players were men; and those waiting their turn lost no opportunity to cast appreciative glances at Janine. With half a dozen admirers

coaching her, I was not surprised that she had become an expert in so short a time.

I had always disliked shuffleboard, but I went downstairs, through the lobby, hurried outside, and played shuffleboard for the rest of the afternoon.

Mountain House, for reasons which became more and more incomprehensible to me, was crowded. A table for two could not be arranged, so Janine and I were assigned to take our meals in the dining room with two other couples: a Mr. and Mrs. Pratt, from Jersey City; and a Mr. and Mrs. Sooner from Philadelphia.

At breakfast, we introduced ourselves rather formally. Mr. Pratt, short, mustached, wearing a bright bow tie and a short-sleeved sports shirt, volunteered the information that he was an accountant with the Invincible Automatic Parts Company. Mr. Sooner, florid and expansive, hung a paper yachting cap on the back of his chair, and announced that he was an office manager for a Philadelphia concern.

The ladies had little to say, but as soon as Janine spoke and automatically revealed she was French, Mr. Pratt and Mr. Sooner began questioning her enthusiastically. Mr. Pratt had studied French in high school but, he admitted, it had grown a little rusty. He straightened up in his chair and cleared his throat.

I knew what was coming and began to brace myself in advance, wishing that for once in my life I would be surprised, that Mr. Pratt's question would not be the inevitable one.

He opened and shut his mouth a few times for practice, then out it came:

"*Madamo-zel, parley-voo fransay?*"

From the beginning, Janine had written me how furious it made her when someone asked if she spoke French. I had

seen her in action since then. Her usual tactic was to say "*Oui*, but do you?" then launch rapidly into a series of comments on the mentality and ancestry of any *espèce d'andouille* who had to ask what language a Parisian spoke.

Mr. Pratt compounded his error by stating, with conviction: "*Le crayon est sur la table.*"

I turned my head away, unable to face what was bound to happen. Janine could only be waiting to pounce.

All innocence and elation, Mr. Pratt went on, far past the point of no return: "*Où est le ploom de mong taunte?*"

I waited for the guillotine to be tripped. Instead, I heard Janine say, in a voice full of tolerance, "Monsieur Pratt, you speak the French almost like a Parisian!"

"Like a *vache espagnole*," I muttered, then felt Janine's toe on my shin and heard a whispered admonition, "Rainette, do not be so unpolite!"

Mr. Sooner could hardly wait his chance at the conversation. Not only had he studied French in high school, but had been to Gay Paree during the war. He began to reel off the names of streets, of bars, and had just begun a fascinating anecdote concerning a girl— "*oong jung feel*" he translated for Janine's benefit—he met one evening on the Champs Elizes, when the waitress arrived.

Janine was granted the courtesy of ordering first. She looked up and down the menu and found the notation "Eggs—any style."

"*Oui*, that is what I would lak," she told the waitress. "Will you bring me some of those eggs any style?"

Before I could explain anything, Mr. Pratt rushed gallantly to the rescue. He detailed all possible ways of serving eggs, described each one, and in short, took charge of ordering Janine's entire breakfast.

"Now, Rainette," Janine said, "why do you not ever explicate me those things about eggs?"

I ate toast and coffee in silence while Mr. Pratt and Mr. Sooner outshone each other praising France and French womanhood. I was not the only one out of sorts; Mrs. Sooner and Mrs. Pratt both glared furtively at Janine.

By the time breakfast ended, Mr. Sooner still had not finished his story about the "jung feel," but he had given us his Philadelphia address and telephone number; Mr. Pratt extracted a solemn promise from Janine that she would stop in and say hello if she ever happened to be in Jersey City.

"There's only one thing you overlooked," Mrs. Sooner told her husband in a steely tone. "You were in Paris during the war all right, but you forgot to mention it was World War I."

As soon as word got around Mountain House that one of the guests was a beautiful Parisienne, it seemed impossible to find a male visitor who had not suddenly developed a profound interest in France, who had not been there at one time or another—or known someone who had. Janine and I could not walk from the dining room to the swimming pool, or read magazines in the lobby, without having Mr. Pratt, Mr. Sooner, or anyone else able to detach himself from the custody of his wife, joining us.

"Us" is hardly the word, for Janine alone was the center of attention. I had the uncomfortable feeling that my presence was unnecessary; there was little for me to do other than stand idly with my hands in my pockets, listening to a constant volley of "*Parlay-voo fransay?*" until I began to wish that Mountain House had been swallowed up in an avalanche before my reservations were ever confirmed.

It was clear that my fears for Janine were groundless. She was enjoying herself thoroughly. I could not imagine how I ever believed she would feel ill at ease. She dabbled her

toes in the pool and, although she could not swim, there were enough admirers in attendance for her to walk from one end of the pool to the other without getting her feet wet.

On the badminton court, she blossomed into a veritable tiger. I was hardly able to hit the shuttlecock at all; but Janine raced from one quarter to the other, dazzling all opponents with a backhand style she learned in less than an hour. Being consistently trounced, I eventually retired to watch from the sidelines while others took over my racquet most willingly. Even the Dalmatian dog, always on hand to dash after the shuttlecocks—a dog who would go through a whole repertoire of tricks for Janine—gave me a look he must have reserved for transient berry-pickers.

Around the middle of the week, Mr. Emas, the recreational director in charge of compulsory fun, organized a softball game of husbands versus wives. Before it started, I tried to explain the rudiments of the game to Janine.

She nodded her head. "I understand, Rainette, but surely it is the impossibility to hit the little ball with such a thin *bâton*?"

"You have three *tours*," I said. "If you miss, it is a strike."

"Strike?" Janine asked. "*Une grève*, like the unions, and the game stops?"

"No, you have two more *tours*. If you finally do hit the ball, then you run to the first little bag there . . ."

As I should have foreseen, my primitive explanation of the national game was taken over by the remainder of the husbands' team. By the time they finished, Janine had been coached with instructions on how to grip the bat, how to lead off a base, how to steal, to bunt, and to slide home.

The husbands lost, of course. I would not dream of accusing them of treachery, but I had the distinct impression that our pitcher was somehow a little slower, our fielders

somehow a little less alert, and the second baseman practically spreading out a red carpet whenever Janine came to the plate. I remember Janine, too, as a streak of white shorts, striped shirt, and flying black hair, racing from one bag to the next, then calling to me across the diamond:

"Rainette, it was a run home!"

Needless to say, in all my times at bat, I fanned.

I should have been glad Janine was having so much fun. But I must admit frankly that I was jealous, and hardly in a frame of mind to appreciate her conquests. To make matters worse, Mountain House and I did not operate on the same schedule. Mornings, when I worked on my manuscript, Janine sunned herself by the side of the pool. Mountain House was really at its best then, the water cool and refreshing, the hills green and quiet; even the lake looked inviting, despite the weeds. But afternoons, when I finished my writing stint, put on my bathing suit, and went out for a swim, I would find that Mr. Emas had shanghaied the guests into a rousing game of water polo; or else he had staged a water carnival—one feature of which was a contest to determine who could capture and hold a greased watermelon. If I waited until the pool was deserted, then dove in, I was very likely to emerge covered with a thin film of vegetable shortening.

I sought refuge in the cabañas and was lucky to find an empty one. If I went to sleep there, I stood a good chance of being galvanized by Mr. Emas' whistle, summoning us to have a group photograph taken or to participate in one of his damnable gymkhanas of three-legged races, sack races or peanut derbies.

Our pleasantest times were evenings just after dinner, when the other guests sat in the lobby or prepared to attend the ancient movies shown in the recreation hall. Janine and

I walked down to the lakeside where the canoes had been beached. If I had no ability in sports and games, at least I liked to believe I could do a good job of paddling.

We made our way to the upper end of the lake and investigated the shallow rivulets that fed it. Janine installed herself on a cushion at one end of the canoe and trailed her finger in the water.

"You know, Rainette," she said, "you should not be so disagreeable with these people all the time. They have much envy to be friendly."

Disentangling my paddle from a clump of weeds, I told her that it could hardly make much difference whether I was agreeable or not.

"You anger yourself because they do not speak the French well. Yet I do not speak the English well, and they do not anger themselves, or make funny of me. I have not liked being a foreigner in your country, but no one has made me unwelcome. I have learned these things in the past year and in some fashion I will be a little sorry when we leave America. The Americans do many silly things and know nothing at all about the liver, but there are very few wicked ones. Sometimes, Rainette, I thank I am much wiser about the Americans than you are."

I admitted she had a point and began to feel a little sheepish about my antisocial behavior. With thoughts of turning over a new leaf and making my truce with Mountain House, I headed back toward the dock. Carried away by my own good spirits, I tried some fancy paddling. The canoe rocked back and forth; Janine screamed and tried to recover her balance. Before I could do anything about it, the canoe overturned and spilled us into the lake.

Although the water near the dock was no higher than her waist, Janine claimed she was drowning. As I sloshed through a morass of weeds to reach her, I noticed Mr.

Pratt, Mr. Sooner and several others at the beach. They had evidently come down to escort Janine to the movies, and all were dressed in their best for the occasion. Without hesitation they plunged into the water. Only Mr. Pratt took the precaution of rolling up his trousers. A dozen hands hoisted Janine from the water.

I walked ashore.

"So you see, Rainette," Janine told me as we wrung out our clothes in the room, "if you had been more *gentil*, perhaps they would have fish you out, too."

Without answering, I continued pulling weeds from my pockets. Considering Janine's popularity, I was less disappointed at not being hauled from the water than surprised at not being held under.

As much as I tried to create an atmosphere of brotherhood between Mountain House and myself, I drew the line when Janine came to our room one Thursday afternoon and held up a red blouse and a frilly brief skirt.

"Monsieur Emas gave me the costume," she said. "We are all going to have a . . . a *nuit des amateurs*. I do not know exactly what that means, but it will be on Saturday night and because I am French they want me to dance the cancan. Mr. Emas himself is going to sing, and Mr. Soonaire promised to play on the banjo."

I threw down my pencil. This time Mr. Emas had gone too far. I absolutely refused to let Janine make a spectacle of herself in a cancan costume.

Janine disregarded me entirely; she was busily trying on the skirt. Then she turned:

"Rainette, I have not the intention to listen to you. You are . . . *qu'est-ce que Monsieur Emas m'a dit* . . . a . . . a killer of joy."

I advised Janine that she could call me anything she liked,

a spoilsport or a *couverture mouillée*; I had said my final word. If she so much as set foot outside the room thinly disguised as a cancan dancer, I would leave her at Mountain House and go back to Philadelphia alone.

We both sulked throughout the afternoon. On Friday I worked angrily on the manuscript all day. The worst part of it was that I firmly believed Janine would dress like a devil dancer, once she had made her mind up; and I knew that I had no intention of carrying out my threat.

By Saturday morning I had still discovered no possible way of saving face. I was surprised when Janine told me she had decided not to go.

I was glad she had realized that dancing the cancan in the middle of the Poconos was hardly a ladylike pursuit.

"It is not that, Rainette," she said. "But I have started to not fill so good. I meant to tell you before we went away, but I forgot. I thank I am going to have a baby."

# CHAPTER 9

I do not remember staying to watch the *nuit des amateurs*. In my confusion following Janine's announcement, I only recall my first reaction: to get her back to civilization as soon as possible. Speeding down the mountain roads, brakes squealing at every turn, I wondered how Janine could have blithely risked playing badminton, baseball, and other dangerous sports, knowing her condition. She was utterly careless and irresponsible, I told her, as I swung out to pass a farm truck and nearly acquired a couple of chickens as a radiator decoration.

We reached Philadelphia in a little better than half the time it had taken us to find Mountain House. I asked Janine when she thought we should break the news to my parents.

She smiled. "The news? But I have already tell your mother, a long time ago. And your sister, too. By this time I am sure your mother has tell your father, and your sister has tell her husband. And I have written to my mother and sister, and Georges, and *la cousine* Yolande. As for your nephew, he will find out soon enough."

"And so," I said with as much indignation as I could raise, "it's true: The husband is always the last to know."

"Why not?" Janine asked. "This is an affair of women." She smiled inscrutably.

As the summer ended, I realized how right she was. The days that followed were worse than the worst days with Judy. Now I rarely saw Janine until we were ready to go to bed. The rest of the time she was with my mother, aunt, sister, or all three at once, talking among themselves in a corner of the apartment or living room.

Their favorite gathering place was my mother's bedroom, and whenever I saw the four of them, draped in various attitudes over the bed, I knew there was no use my trying to enter their conversation. As soon as I, or any of the males in the household, came near, they would stop talking and stare at the ceiling with an interest far out of proportion to anything they might see there.

I had resolved to take approaching parenthood casually. I had seen enough cartoons and movies to be warned against the nervous husband. In spite of it all, I could not help looking at Janine in a new and indefinable light. At Christmas, less than a year before, I had hidden a present in her shoe, and I remembered thinking that the shoe was no bigger than a child's. We had both been something like children in those days. Now Janine was thoroughly absorbed in her "affair of women."

Whatever mysterious circles she moved in were beyond me. We were as close as we had always been—up to a point. From there, the "affair of women" took over and left me feeling still a child. There was little to change this uncomfortable sensation. On the contrary. My mother went through a stage of resurrecting whatever baby clothes she could find—not to mention the toys and games I thought had long since gone to the incinerator. She brought them

out at the slightest provocation, to Janine's delight and my complete disgust.

"*Tiens*," Janine would giggle, "I never knew you wore such things. You must have been so *gentil*—and see how grumbling you have become."

Since Janine saw me for the first time in an army uniform and a pair of rather greasy boots, I could understand her surprise at a pair of velvet shorts with enormous pearl buttons. I had hated them twenty years before, and I hated them just as much twenty years later.

"And this *mignon petit* sweater," she added. "Here, Rainette, let me hold it against you and see how you have grown."

I would have been undisturbed had Janine followed the traditional pattern of waking in the middle of the night with an intense yearning for pickles and ice cream. I might even have joined her. But baby clothes—specifically mine —were more than I could tolerate.

As if this were not enough, my mother brought out the family albums. Here, even my father and brother-in-law were not immune. The three of us developed an animal sense of when such an evening was in the wind, and we scattered.

While the women of the house formed a solid bloc, the men were left to their own devices. Instead of uniting, we took refuge on private islands. My brother-in-law developed a sudden interest in woodworking and rigged up a power saw in the cellar. At night the whole house was filled with shrieking banshees that emerged whenever he had a knotty piece of wood to cut up. My nephew discovered the fascination of electricity—but confined himself to wiring extraloud doorbells and buzzer systems that seemed to operate on a charge of at least four thousand volts. My father consoled himself with the radio—turned up to full volume to drown

out the power saw and buzzer. The Irish setter barked in self-defense.

I fled to my tent. Whether the idea came to me inspired by the noise and the baby clothes, I do not know. But I did reach the conclusion that, however small, an addition to the household would cause an explosion.

The best solution was to buy our own house. As a veteran, I could arrange the mortgage through the government. Making the down payment was a problem, but I would have to find a way of solving it. The carrying charges on a house would be cheaper than most apartments—and there were still other angles to my plan.

I took the idea up with Janine as soon as I could tear her away from her female in-laws. Her reaction was a point-blank refusal. How could I think of buying a house when we were going back to Paris?

"*Ecoute*," I said, "we couldn't go back to Paris until the baby is born even if we did have the money."

"If we had the money," Janine said, "we could go back immediately. I might be seasick, but I am sure the *enfant* would enjoy the trip. He would not even render count of the difference."

I threw in more reserves. The house was crowded already. If there were too much confusion for me even to write a book, how could Janine expect a child to grow up into a normal human being? I warned her that children were impressionable. Could she imagine the effect of the buzzers, bells, and saws on him? He might grow up to be a writer.

With conditions in France as they were, I went on, it would be much better to wait until the baby was a year or so old. That meant we were committed to stay in America at least two years.

"But we are late going back already," Janine moaned.

"And this house . . . this *grande maison* you keep talking about like *une espèce de fou* . . . if we have not the money for Paris, how can we have it for anything else?"

I told Janine I had always respected the French business sense. But she must have lost hers somewhere between Le Havre and Philadelphia. Admitting that buying a house would take all our savings and more—I would have to borrow the remainder of the down payment—a house was property, real estate. I asked her to consider the housing shortage, bound to get worse for the next few years. A house was an investment. We would be sure to sell it at a profit, and in one transaction earn more than we could possibly save in ten years.

My figuring might have been exaggerated, but Janine began to listen seriously. "It is not a bad idee, Rainette. I cannot understand why I did not thank of it before."

Then I brought up my last big gun. "The Napoleonic Code," I reminded her, "clearly states that a wife must live where her husband chooses."

Janine nodded respectfully at the mention of the former emperor. "A wise law and encouraging for family life. *Très bien*, Rainette. I will live where you live, because most of the time it is enjoyable. But, no import what Napoleon said; if we buy a house, it is I who will choose it!"

The next day I got in touch with a real-estate agent, Mr. Dorbinder. He was a happy man when we first met him; he beamed at Janine as he flipped through his listing cards with the confident efficiency of a bank teller counting a stack of bills. He never stopped smiling, although his face fell for an instant when I told him how much we had to spend.

The price we could pay eliminated most of the houses in Mr. Dorbinder's listings. But he assured us he would find something. From then on, he stopped by our place once

or twice a week and escorted us to whatever properties he had available. As we drove along, Mr. Dorbinder described the hardwood floors, the heating system, the storm windows, the spacious grounds.

"But how could one dream to give up a house like that?" Janine asked. "This is surely a country of nomads."

Mr. Dorbinder explained that most of the owners were moving because they had found something a little better. I could believe it. It was hard to imagine anything worse outside of Dogpatch.

In addition, Janine revealed a fiendish knack for discovering faults. Like the skeleton in every closet, it seemed that each house contained a hidden, horrible secret. Janine picked it out every time.

"The tubes that go round the roof . . ." she said. "There must be something wrong, because all the water goes into the walls. You see . . ." She pointed at the ceiling, where a thin brown line circled the area. I would never have seen it.

"The big stove in the cellar . . . what you call the furnace . . . makes a very loud cough, and is not breathing well at all . . ."

In the weeks that followed, Mr. Dorbinder did not smile as much; the spring had gone out of his walk. He stood, perhaps dreaming of a better world in which real-estate customers were nearsighted and hard of hearing, while Janine examined his offerings with the cynical and distrustful eye of a French housewife inspecting a head of cabbage.

"And those little animals in the wood," Janine said. "At first I thought they were American bees, but they are not that *du tout*."

At first, Mr. Dorbinder had parked in front of our house, stepped jauntily along the walk, and escorted Janine to the car. As the weeks went on, he merely tooted the horn for

us and waited, silent and meditative, until we came out. His face was mournful, and he gave sudden starts whenever Janine began talking.

By late fall, I had begun to think that most of the inhabitants of the United States lived in constant danger of their houses falling down about their ears. And Janine showed no sign of liking anything she saw.

As a special favor, Mr. Dorbinder drove us to a housing development far out of his territory. The properties were handled by a different agent but, as Mr. Dorbinder told us with a sickly smile, he had come to consider it a matter of personal interest for Janine to find a house as soon as possible.

We looked at the ranks of identical houses, each with an identical spot of grass in front, identical clothesline from which identical clothes waved in the breeze. Mr. Dorbinder told us that more houses were being put up, and we could have one in three months.

"*C'est formidable,*" Janine said, "this production mass. Zip-zip-zip and *voilà!* But these houses are all like your hats. In France, we have the beret, the cap, the Borsalino. Here the hats are all the same, with a little pinch in front and a triangle on the top as if to carry a piece of pie."

Mr. Dorbinder apprehensively put a hand to his own hat. He admitted that the houses looked alike, but they were better than the others we had seen and at least they were in our price range.

"*Oui* . . ." Janine said with hesitation. "But these houses unquiet me. If they are all the same, and we live in them for a while, soon we start looking like the houses instead of the houses looking like us. And all our neighbors will be the same, too; we will be doing everything they do, they will be doing everything we do . . . and that," Janine added, "could sometimes be *très embarrassant!*"

# CHAPTER 10

Our house hunting ended abruptly late in November. Janine had not been feeling well for several days, and it was evident that things were no longer an affair of women, but an affair of doctors. Dr. Elsen, the obstetrician Janine had been reluctantly visiting, ordered her to bed and insisted she follow his course of treatment to the letter.

I carried her meals to our apartment and sat beside her to make sure she ate, and that she did not hide her pills under the mattress.

"You are worry for nothing, Rainette," Janine said. "This doctor does not render count that I am French."

I said nothing. Earlier in the day I had talked to Dr. Elsen, who told me frankly there was little he could do. A miscarriage was almost inevitable. He did not know whether Janine would have to go to the hospital or how serious the aftereffects might be.

I did not tell her, sure she would not have believed me. That night she began to hemorrhage severely. The doctor had already reserved a hospital room, and I took her there

immediately. I waited in the anteroom for an hour or so.

Dr. Elsen finally came out. The child was dead. His only concern now was with Janine. He suggested another specialist for the operation. It would not be too serious, but Janine would have to stay in the hospital at least a week, perhaps longer, depending on what had to be done.

I saw Janine again in the afternoon. She looked very small, her face was drawn and white. Her roommate, a middle-aged woman with hair in pin curls, slept soundly. Janine gave me a wry smile.

"It is bad enough when the American doctors come to the house," she said, "but when one goes to the hospital, it is worse. First they instruct the nurses, no matter what is wrong, it is necessary to poke the needle. *Cette pauvre dame* next to me, came only to remove a cyst on her heel—but even she does not escape the ferocious needle.

"And when they do not know what is wrong, they give twice as many. Really, Rainette, that is all your doctors do. *Piff! Paff!* In all sorts of places," she added painfully.

"And the thermometers, Rainette! It is a disgrace! Do you know where they put them?" Janine made a dreadful face. "In the mouth! When I was sick before, the doctor made me hold a thermometer in my mouth. But I thought that was only because he was a savage—which I always suspected. But here, in a hospital where they should know better, they do the same thing!"

I looked at her with surprise. "What else did you expect?"

"It is better the way they put the thermometer in France. You can talk and eat, and it is not uncomfortable at all."

"Where do they put the thermometer in France," I asked suspiciously.

"Under the arm, *bien sûr!*"

Janine was quiet for a while. "They never told me whether it was a boy or a girl," she said at last.

The Philadelphia winter was beginning when I brought Janine home from the hospital. She did not have the energy to complain about it. Those days I would find her curled up in the overstuffed chair, idly turning the pages of the child-care books I had bought earlier in the fall.

To distract her, I tried to plan a new schedule of amusements. I was tired of being victimized by the budget and decided we should make a point of going out for dinner plus a movie or theater at least once a week.

On the way home we always stopped off for refreshments. Janine had never liked American bars. The first time she visited one, she looked around at the orange and blue neon fixtures and the shadowy booths along the wall.

"But Rainette," she whispered, "this is very bad for the vision. There is not enough light. How do they intend for one to read the newspapers?"

In Paris, most of the cafés offered their clients a selection of newspapers, clipped into wooden holders. In the United States, I told Janine, customers were expected to buy their own.

"But if we had envy to play cards, the *garçon* would surely bring them, and a nice piece of green cloth to cover the table?"

"No cards," I said, "and no green cloth."

"And suppose I wanted to write a letter to *la cousine* Yolande? At least the barman would give me a *plume*, a pot of ink, and some paper, as they do in Paris?"

"No," I said, "but he might lend you his fountain pen."

"Then I do not like your American cafés," Janine said. "Not only do I find no terraces, but you tell me there are no newspapers, no card playing, no letter writing . . . What species of place is that, where you have nothing to do but drink!"

So, instead of having a night cap, we simply went to a drugstore. I had taken Janine to one of the big drugstores in town when she first arrived. Her attitude had been suspicious.

"*Les drogues?*" she asked. "It is permitted to traffic in narcotics?"

I explained that the purpose of a drugstore was no different from that of a French *pharmacie*, where prescriptions could be filled and one could buy household medicines.

"*Alors*," Janine said, "what are these toys? And lamps? And I see an *étalage* of electric pocket lamps, perfume, a hose for the garden, and a hammer . . ."

I pointed out the prescription department's cubbyhole in the rear of the shop and led her to the soda fountain.

"*Une fontaine à soda?*" she asked. "When do they turn it on?" She went to the counter. "Ah, I understand. The *pharmacien* is also a *restaurateur*."

We sat down on the revolving stools. Janine spun around gaily until she complained of dizziness. She stared at the pictures of cherry-topped sundaes, overflowing sodas, and triple-decker sandwiches.

"Sundays," she repeated to herself, "*les dimanches?*" Then she gave a scream. "This is not really true? Surely the Americans would not sell the meat of dogs!"

I saw her pointing at a poster advertising hot dogs and began to laugh. "They are only sausages," I said. "Little red *saucisses* on a roll."

"But the signification of the name . . . a dog is *un chien*. *Un chien chaud* is a dog that is hot. Even you cannot lie to me about that, Rainette."

"But that is *argot*," I said. "It doesn't mean a real dog. We sometimes call them frankfurters. You eat them in France, too—not on rolls, but with sauerkraut."

"In France, where they are *les saucisses de Francfort,* they are very good and I will eat them. In America, where they are named dogs, I refuse to touch them."

I could not persuade Janine to try one. The hamburgers had also become suspect in her eyes. We studied the menu. I asked for a milk shake, and Janine agreed to try a sundae. I ordered a banana split for her.

When the soda jerk—*le secoueur des sodas*—produced it, Janine looked in horror at the mounds of ice cream, festoons of whipped cream, nuts, pineapple, and cherries.

"This is not possible to eat," she said. "With all these shake milks and split bananas, now I understand why your American women have so many people on the balcony."

After Janine grew accustomed to the American concept of pharmacy, she could not pass a drugstore without stopping to rummage through the counters. Still, she never did become a fan of the *fontaine à soda,* and another drugstore feature continued to puzzle her. It was the pinball machine.

She watched, eyes wide, as the metal balls rolled around the maze of bumpers and dropped into the holes, while the score panel flashed brilliant red and blue lights, numbers blinked, and bells rang. The players fascinated her, too. "Look, Rainette," she whispered. "It must be terribly difficult. See how they must make their lips tight and revolve the *derrière* . . . and now there is one who seizes the machine to wrestle with it . . ."

The ominous word "TILT" flashed on the scoreboard, and the player turned away.

"Quick, Rainette," Janine urged, "give me a buffalo."

I handed her a nickel and warned her against jolting the machine. Biting her tongue, Janine released the first ball. Her body-english was excellent for a beginner, although she

rotated her *derrière* in a manner that would have seemed strange to most pinball players. Her first score was low, only a few thousand. She looked at the board in disappointment.

"I wiggled as much as I could, Rainette, but it made no difference."

She improved after that, however, and ended the game with five million. Janine laughed with glee. "Now I suppose we go to the manager and demand our *cinq millions*."

"There is nothing to demand," I told her.

"Why do you say that, Rainette?" she frowned.

"Because you already have it," I said. "Five million points."

"Pwoints!" Janine exclaimed. "You mean there is no prize?"

"If you had ten million," I said, "you would get a free game. With twenty million, two free games."

"And even then I would only get more pwoints? I cannot use them in the store?" Janine turned away. "There is no sense in you Americans, with your ball-pin machines. One does nothing but spend buffaloes for something that does not exist, for pwoints that one cannot even take home!"

Our trips in town did little to cheer Janine. Staying at home was no better.

"I went into the kitchen," she told me, "where your mother was drying the dishes. And I commenced to help, but as soon as she saw me she dropped the towel and started making a cup of tea. Then she said I must not stand on my feet so much or I would be fatigued.

"So she made me go back to the living room and sit down. And she brought the tea and said I must drink it right away. I did not want tea, Rainette, and besides it was very hot. But I had to drink it all, and your mother said, 'That

will make you feel much better.' It was not true. Because I was feeling all right before the tea but afterward I felt terribill!"

Janine twisted her handkerchief. "And your aunt, whenever she sees me walking down the stairs, she comes running and takes my arm. 'One step at a time,' she says; I only do take one step at a time, but I take them faster. Now if your aunt sees me, we have to spend half an hour coming down, because of stopping every time. She says if I do not, I will hurt my insides. But I have French insides, Rainette, and they do not hurt.

"And now everyone is talking in the whispers and walking on the ends of their feet so they will not make noise. When I go into a room and they are there, they make the sorrowful faces with a lot of sighing, or they start to put a blanket on my feet.

"Your family is *très gentille*," Janine said, "but they do not need to treat me like the invalid. It is all so *mélancolique*."

I agreed with her. For myself, I felt the family's house and our apartment weighing on me. For Janine, I believed nothing could do more good than a complete change.

The idea of a house as a means of getting her back to Paris quickly was still a good one. When the winter began to show signs of letting up, we dropped in on Mr. Dorbinder again.

I had not seen him for several months, and he had given up trying to find anything for us. He looked much better now than at our last meeting, but a haunted look appeared in his eyes when he saw Janine. He listened to our new demands for a house and rested his head on one hand, while he drew spider webs across his memorandum pad.

"There is nothing," Mr. Dorbinder said. "The houses you looked at before have already been sold. You would

not like the new ones any better. What I suggest you do is try another state—Nevada, or perhaps Arizona."

He continued with his spider webs. "The West," Mr. Dorbinder said, "is full of opportunities. Arizona? But why stop there? California is even more interesting. Your wife would learn geography, the history of the pioneers. Since she is interested in houses, she could inspect the dwellings of the Pueblo Indians, wigwams, huts . . . She would be able to study our most primitive housing conditions . . ."

Mr. Dorbinder paused. "Come to think of it," he said, "I do have something here that might suit you." He took a dog-eared listing card from the bottom of his desk drawer.

He had a strange expression on his face. Had I been obliged to define it, I would have called it a look of revenge —or possibly the air of someone about to play a practical joke.

# CHAPTER 11

Mr. Dorbinder drove us out to look at the property, a couple of miles from my parents' house, but in a section of the community I had never explored. The number of solid, white-collar suburban houses dwindled; cultivated lawns gave way to vacant lots. Mr. Dorbinder turned a corner and drove down a narrow valley. We could have been twenty miles in the country, judging from the screen of bushes lining the road.

Another turn brought us to a lumpy, pot-holed street—the only one, as far as I could see, in this forgotten pocket of a neighborhood. A red brick church rose in the distance. A row of threadbare houses, each capped with a crooked chimney pot, lined one side of the street. At the end of the pavement, a gigantic elm hunched up its roots like a chilly octopus. The only thing that kept the neighborhood from looking as if it had been untouched for about a hundred years was the smattering of TV aerials sprouting from the rooftops.

Mr. Dorbinder stopped the car. We followed him past a stone wall covered with a mane of barberry. The house,

sitting a few yards back from the wall, was high and gawky. At first glance I thought it was made of brick, but at close range I saw that the walls had been covered with faded, lemon-yellow insulation trying to disguise itself as masonry. A cracked chimney, patched with plaster, jutted like a bandaged thumb. Another chimney, in equally bad repair, craned its neck from the opposite slope.

The real-estate agent rubbed his hands. "Well, shall we have a look around?"

"*Tiens*, Rainette!" Janine called. "See how big!"

Mr. Dorbinder nodded. "Yes, the lot itself is rather large; unfortunately it hasn't been too well kept up."

Mr. Dorbinder was guilty of exaggeration. The grounds had not been poorly kept up; they had not been kept up at all. A circle of mulberry trees and a maple occupied one area; the rest, an enormous expanse of jungle. Janine and I followed him on a safari to the outlying regions of the property.

In the midst of the weeds, cleverly camouflaged by honeysuckle vines, a wooden shack leaned nonchalantly at a thirty-degree angle. I stopped to look at it for a moment. As an architectural curiosity, it compared favorably with the Leaning Tower of Pisa. While Janine went thrashing through the high grass, to study the shack in profile, I pulled on an iron hasp and opened the door.

Inside I found a few rolls of tarpaper on a wooden workbench, a funnel, and a tire carcass. A bag of cement, burst open at the seams, had been exposed to a leak, and the contents had petrified. On the gravel floor stood an empty paint can and a scraggly brush.

"The tool shed is included with the property," Mr. Dorbinder said. I suspected it was; I'd have been more interested in its being unincluded.

The remnants of a vegetable garden stretched in the lee

of the shack. Beanpoles, unhampered by the slightest sign of a bean, stood at all angles. In the middle of the garden I stumbled on a mattress.

I could not estimate how long it had lain there. The stuffing had come out, and the mattress was almost transformed into a part of the ground, entwined with creepers, surrounded by inkweed a yard high. What puzzled me was not the age of the mattress but what it was doing there in the first place. I wondered idly whether the previous owner enjoyed naps among the tomato vines or lay there to ambush marauding crows.

Mr. Dorbinder invited us to enter the house. "It has been empty for some time," he cautioned us, "and the former owner was a little careless."

The grounds suggested a jungle, but the interior reminded me of the last days of Pompeii. A coffee cup, saucer, and spoon rested on the sink beside a machine that looked like a combination meat grinder and time bomb. I picked up this archeological treasure and showed it to Mr. Dorbinder.

"A spaghetti machine," he explained. "The lady of the house used to make it herself and hang it in the back yard to dry."

The rooms were hard to identify. One seemed to be a living room to which kitchen cupboards had been added; another, a dining area with a wardrobe and a hatrack. A five-year-old newspaper was spread over a table. I discovered a few more cups and saucers, two or three knives and forks, and a pair of spectacles.

"I presume," I told Mr. Dorbinder, "all this is included?"

"Of course. You're welcome to keep anything you find."

Walking through a tiny hallway to the other rooms, I had the feeling of being aboard ship in a heavy sea. The

flooring listed first to port, then starboard. I was prepared at any moment to hear a foghorn and the voice of Mr. Dorbinder warning, "All ashore that's going ashore!"

Janine had said little during our tour, giving only a perfunctory glance around the rooms. She had practically examined the other houses with a magnifying glass, and I supposed she was as disinterested in this scarcecrow as I.

The second floor, however, was more promising. The rooms were bigger and brighter; an old gas stove and a disconnected sink stood in the corner of one of them.

"The former owners planned to convert this into an apartment," Mr. Dorbinder said. "It would have been most convenient; the piping is already installed, and there is a stairway and side entrance. But evidently they changed their mind."

I had never thought of renting part of the house, but an extra apartment would have been ideal. I was sorry Mr. Dorbinder's property was in such hopeless condition, otherwise I would have been tempted.

We climbed down the side steps to the supposed living room. As a last formality, Janine and I inspected the cellar. Seeing the rest of the house made me a little fearful. I would not have been surprised to find a growth of giant fungus.

We made our way down the rickety stairs to a dirt floor. I did not see any stalactites or stalagmites; there were no signs of American bees, but the cellar had enough water in it to start a fish hatchery. In one corner I found a sack of sprouting potatoes. There was nothing more I dared to look at. We went outside to the car. Mr. Dorbinder rubbed his hands again and looked at us. "That's all I can show you today. I don't suppose it's what you had in mind, but this time I agree with you."

"I like it," Janine said. "How much is the cost?"

Mr. Dorbinder and I looked at her. The real-estate broker blinked his eyes. "I beg your pardon?"

"How much?" Janine repeated.

Mr. Dorbinder named a price too low for even a token gesture of bargaining—but still about twice what the house was worth.

"We will buy the house," Janine said.

Mr. Dorbinder hesitated. "I . . . I'm sure you will be happy with it. A nice property. You're both young and strong . . . lots of fun . . ." He threw up his hands. "Look, I am a real-estate broker but I am also a human being. The house is falling apart. You couldn't do the work yourself and you couldn't afford to pay what it would cost to have it done. Go home and think about it. Give me a week or so, and I promise to find something better."

I told Mr. Dorbinder I appreciated his honesty and hoped he would soon be able to locate another house for us.

"I like it," Janine repeated. "Rainette, we will buy this house. You promised I can choose the one I wanted."

"Yes, but you can't seriously . . . Suppose we do as Mr. Dorbinder says? We'll go home and think it over."

"I have already thanked it over."

I recognized the Marne look in Janine's eyes. We went back to the real-estate office and signed the papers.

When I told my father we had bought a house, he agreed we had done the best thing. "By the way," he asked, "where is it?"

I mentioned the address and began describing the neighborhood. Then I stopped as soon as I saw the expression on his face. His eyes blinked, his mouth opened in dismay and parental grief:

"My God," he said, "you bought a house in Reillytown!"

From the tone of his voice, I might have announced that Janine and I had decided to settle at the innermost circle of the Inferno.

At first I thought my father had used the term "Reillytown" as an equivalent for "Shantytown" or "Hooverville." But he told me that many years before the community's name had indeed been Reillytown. The original Reilly had been a tall, red-headed Irishman who conceived the idea of building cheap houses for the mill employees. He completed only a few—the little row near the church—before falling victim to a family curse: neutral spirits and burned sugar. Over the past eighty years, the community had grown a little, then stopped. As far as the township administration and the post office were concerned, this raffish section was a part of our own neighborhood. Every so often, the council made unsuccessful attempts to transfer Reillytown to the adjacent township. Some of the more imaginative members suggested giving it to New Jersey.

My father's next question was more urgent. "Can you get your money back?"

I doubted it. The papers had been sent in, and I had already given Mr. Dorbinder a deposit.

My father shook his head. "My dear boy," he said, "I am not asking you to think of your family. Think of your wife. Paris is a magnificent city, one of the great capitals of the world. To bring this poor girl from the City of Light to . . . to Reillytown . . ." He sighed heavily. "No, it is impossible; to begin with, her health would not stand the strain . . ."

He offered to make good on the deposit himself if Mr. Dorbinder could not get it back. Later, when we found something elsewhere, he would make up any difference in the down payment. I carried his proposal to Janine.

"*Non et non!*" she cried. "This is the house I saw, this is the house we live in."

This time even the Napoleonic Code could not change her decision.

To celebrate our purchase I took Janine to dinner at her favorite restaurant: the automat.

Whenever we were in town, Janine never missed a chance to eat at an automat, but she had not been so fond of it during her first visit. Fundamentally she was not enthusiastic over any restaurant.

"When they give you the menu," Janine complained, "you see French names—but when you order, it is not what you expect and it is sure to be sweet, because you Americans cook with nothing but sugar. The names are not correct, *d'ailleurs*. This pie *à la mode, par exemple: à la mode* is not enough; you can have *tripes à la mode de Caen* . . . but not just *tarte à la mode*. In any case, it turns out only to be pie with ice cream on top."

She continued along this line with sandwiches. "Rainette, you should call this the United Sandwiches, because for the most part that is all I see you eat."

While the automat offered no greater variety of food, Janine was always amazed at the rows of windows. At first, she did not believe the food was real.

"That is only *factice*, isn't it, Rainette? So you can see first what you want to buy?"

I assured her the display was genuine; the only way she could get anything to eat was to drop nickels into the slot.

She hesitated over this. "These automatic machines sometimes give me fear," she said. "There is no danger of electric shock?"

I selected a beef pie and returned with it unscathed. Janine gingerly dropped in her nickels and the glass door unlocked.

"You reach in and get it, Rainette," she said. "The way

it opens looks like a trap, and I have no confidence in these machines whatever."

As I took out her platter, she looked inside the compartment. "*Tiens*, Rainette, there is a big room behind there, with people walking around! *C'est formidable!* I thought the machines made the sandwiches, too! *Eh bien*, you Americans are not so advanced than I thought."

Yet for some reason, the automat caught her fancy, and she would often turn down a chance to go to a more elegant restaurant in favor of it. She specially loved the dolphin heads that poured out milk, coffee, and tea.

"This automat," Janine said, "does not make lights and noises like the ball-pin machines, but *au moins* one gets something for one's buffalo."

The evening after we gave Mr. Dorbinder our deposit, we sat at one of the automat tables and I asked Janine if she was really sure she wanted the house.

"Yes, Rainette, I decided as soon as I saw it; I did not even have to look around. This house is full of charm, only it is all covered up now. If you were a Frenchman, you perhaps would have seen it more easily.

"And then, this house was *sympathique* to me. It is a poor lost dog of a house, and no one cares about it. Then, of course, there is the apartment we can rent. So you see, I am being very practical, too."

If the house was a lost dog to Janine, to me it was a hairy mastodon. Each weekend, as we waited for the final settlement day, we spent hacking at the weeds and overgrown bushes. I must admit Janine worked harder at it than I. At the end of a day in the jungle, her face and arms showed a map of scratches from the recalcitrant hedge. "This house has become lazy since no one lives in it," Janine said, trussing up an armload of sticks. "It does not want to change its ways."

For a time, I thought the house would win. However, by

the end of April, Janine had managed to tame it a little. The weeds did not fight as hard against being pulled up. The dried-out clippings from ancient rosebushes resigned themselves to being burned and gave up twisting around to snap at us before we tossed them into the fire.

Indoors we had achieved little more than a superficial cleaning. After we discarded the cupboard, wardrobe, and hatrack, I realized we had no furniture of our own to replace them.

"It is I who attend to the furniture," Janine said. Once again, she combed through her beloved classified ads. I could only marvel at her knack for putting her hand on anything we needed. She unearthed a quantity of Venetian blinds at fifty cents each; a couple of sofas for twelve dollars; a kitchen table and chairs for another ridiculous figure. Her greatest triumph came in the form of a silver service at about one-tenth of its original cost.

"The only trouble is the initial," she said. "It is a 'Y,' but we can always say *la cousine* Yolande sent it to us."

I was always amazed that Janine could find so many things at such low prices despite the high cost of living. Usually she and my mother handled these shopping raids, but once I had a chance to see Janine in action myself.

Her objective was a carpet, offered for sale by a family moving out of the neighborhood. The lady of the house pointed out the carpet to us. Without further ado, Janine took it by one corner and gave it a sharp flip. She turned it over, examined it for a long time, then hauled it near a window.

"*Ah, non,*" she muttered to herself.

The woman looked on in bewilderment. "It's really a very nice carpet . . ."

I asked the price. Janine, scrutinizing the carpet on hands and knees, shook her head. "That is too much dear, Rainette."

I shrugged, thanked the woman for her trouble, and started to the door. Outside, I realized Janine had not followed me. I waited for a minute, then she came out.

"Now we must roll up the carpet and take it away," she said.

"You mean you want to pay . . ."

Janine gave me a look of pity. "Oh, Rainette, do you not recognize the value? A magnificent carpet for only seven dollars . . ."

"But she asked twenty," I said.

"Perhaps," Janine said, "but nevertheless for me it is seven."

"You see, Rainette," she told me later, "you Americans do not know how to *marchander* . . . to bargain. If somebody tells you the price, you just stand there . . . so!" Here she made a popeyed face and nodded her head like a china figure.

"But I know how to comport myself," she went on. "Have you not observed the affair of the carpet? It is the same for anything else. The first thing to do is look underneath, no matter what it is.

"Then I make an expression—so. It is very serious and unhappy. Next, I put my finger as if I found something wrong, and I look at that spot for a long time. It is nice if you can hold it up to the light, also. Then I shake my head and tell them it is impossible. Finally, I tell them what I will pay.

"Your mother is always very embarrassed when I do these things, but otherwise how can you find anything at *bon marché*? It is too easy, not really fair, because you Americans do not know how to play the game. When I say a price twice as low, you are supposed to say a price twice as high. Then we agree to the middle. But you—*pauvres gens*—always stop too soon. It is unfortunate, but, as we say in France, *le bizness est le bizness*."

At the final settlement, we met Mrs. Lamotta, whose sister had owned the house. Mrs. Lamotta lived in one of the small houses at the end of the street. She was delighted that we had bought the property; I could understand why. Mrs. Lamotta, evidently suffering from twinges of conscience, apologized for its poor condition. Her sister had gone into a decline after her husband disappeared; Mrs. Lamotta did not have much time to help.

"It was all the fault of that no-good Pascuccio," Mrs. Lamotta cried and waved her arms. "Instead of staying home and looking after things, he was out every night, in Goozik's taproom with the O'Reilly girls. When he did anything, he did it wrong. Look at how he started building the apartment and never finished it. Got tired of it, he said.

"He was a lazy one, that Pascuccio. It's a blessing he disappeared, even though it did send my poor sister to an early grave. It served him right. And at least she had sense enough to get the house in her name."

Janine nodded sympathetically. I had no idea who Goozik or the O'Reilly girls were, but I was sure that Mrs. Lamotta's sister had reason to complain.

"Don't listen to what the Mahoneys say, either," Mrs. Lamotta warned. "They're no better than the O'Reillys—and that's no surprise, because they're cousins."

I promised to disregard anything a Mahoney might tell me—only hoping they would not advise me to disregard the remarks of Mrs. Lamotta.

We moved into the house the next day. My parents had given us the bed and the other furniture from the third floor; the rest was not enough to fill a light panel truck.

"*Eh bien*, Rainette," Janine said, "here we are *chez nous*. Soon we will repair the apartment and rent it; it is good for the house to be in such bad state, because later we can sell it for much more. Then we will go to Paris."

She slept peacefully, but I tossed uncomfortably that first night, wondering whether we actually could get rid of the house some day, or whether it would turn out to be an asphalt-covered albatross. I had never signed a mortgage before; I envisioned myself failing to keep up the payments and Janine being evicted by a sheriff named O'Reilly. We still knew little about the house and neighborhood, and I shuddered to think what we might learn. For a while I dreamed Pascuccio had come back from wherever he had been, twirling a dapper black mustache and laughing to be rid of a white elephant.

I woke up. One thing I had just learned: the dogs of Reillytown enjoyed howling at the moon.

# CHAPTER 12

Next day, Janine was ready to start work indoors. But as much as the house cried for improvements, I felt we needed something else just as urgently: a car. The local bus ran unpredictably during the week and shut down entirely on Sundays. In the neighborhood, the only practical transportation was by automobile. Janine disapproved immediately.

"A bicycle would be so much better, Rainette," she said. "It is good exercise and it takes you where you want to go. In Paris, I had a bicycle all the time and it was very economical; all I needed was air. But the automobile is always hungry and thirsty and worse than a horse. Perhaps we can send for a French automobile—the kind that does not need *le gas-oil*, but marches when you burn wood."

"*Tiens*," she added in afterthought, "perhaps it would be cheaper to buy a horse. We would have *le transport* and benefit the garden too.

"Besides, Rainette, I do not like your American cars, they are not *sympathique* like the French ones. They hurt my

eyes when the sun shines on them and they are much too big. The klaxon is so loud, even when I am inside the car I have fear when I hear it. The TSF is always playing, so it sounds like a crowd with only two people."

The car I had in mind, I assured Janine, would have very little chromium to hurt her eyes; at the price we could pay, we would be lucky if the car had wheels, let alone a klaxon.

Like Janine, I became a devoted reader of the classified ads. She herself grew interested in my project and studied the automobile pages along with me.

"*Quand même,*" she said, "America is an extraordinary country. Every automobile in these advertisements is perfect. How the proprietors must care for them . . . They all say: good as new. *Tiens,* here they have made a mistake, because they do not advertise an automobile but *un chou à la crême* . . . what you call a krim-puff."

I tried to explain that a cream puff in this case signified a car in perfect condition and had nothing to do with a bakery.

"But if all these automobiles are perfect," Janine mused, "what then must be a krim-puff? *Formidable!* And here . . . ah, a poor man who has evidently much difficulties, for he is obliged to sacrifice. How terrible it must be for his family. Even in this rich country there are those who suffer."

Finding nothing suitable in the ads, we decided to investigate the used-car lots. Janine looked at the colored pennants and streamers flapping in the wind.

"This is *merveilleux,* Rainette," she cried. "It is like going to *la fête,* buying an automobile. And how friendly the proprietor must be, to take the name *Harry-le-Souriant* . . ."

Smiling Harry had nothing I liked or could afford. We tried our luck with *John-le-Honnête* and *Monk-le-Fou.* Janine watched as I went through the ritual of kicking tires,

listening to the engine, and rocking the chassis back and forth.

A blue coupe attracted me, and I began a business conference with Madman Monk. I tried to follow Janine's bargaining advice by climbing under the car, shaking my head disapprovingly, and singling out a large dent for extra scrutiny. It did not work. Madman Monk was not as carefree as his named implied. Furthermore, I had no car to trade, which put the price far out of range.

"You do not yet know how to do it," Janine said. "You do not frown enough. I, who know nothing of automobiles, can see that you must close the doors with anger and pretend you have no envy for such a *voiture*."

At the next lot, the *Irlandais Heureux*, Janine took over the negotiations:

"These white wools," she told the Happy Irishman, who had already sized us up as low-grade window shoppers and was standing glumly with his hands in his pockets, "they cost more, but I do not understand their functionment."

"Well, a lot of people like them because they're sharp," the Irishman said.

"Sharp?" Janine asked, in distress. "You mean they have the nails in them?"

The Happy Irishman looked shaken. "No, lady. It's just the way they look. You know, snappy . . . classy . . ."

"But the functionment—do the white wools march better?"

The Happy Irishman admitted the white walls had no effect on marching.

"Then the auto will *naturellement* be sheeper?"

The Irishman hesitated. "Not exactly. Without the white walls, it's cheaper, but this model has a radio."

Janine told him we did not want a radio, and the Irishman agreed to take it out if Janine would let him install a

heater. He suggested buying the more expensive heater, because otherwise there would be an extra charge for electric windshield wipers.

"Rainette," Janine whispered to me, "how is this possible? We have done the bargaining for half an hour, but each time he seems to make the price lower it comes out higher. There is something about these white wools and windshield wappers and hitters that makes everything *très* confusing."

Since Janine had given up bargaining, I knew all hope was lost. As we were about to leave the lot, the Happy Irishman beckoned to us. He had something that might interest us. We followed him behind the showroom to a Siberia of used cars.

I have often wondered what there is about Janine—and perhaps myself—that encourages people to start rummaging. At first I felt indignant, but in twelve years I have grown used to it. I am accustomed now to entering a store with Janine, intending to buy, say, a new bedspread. But after a few minutes' private conference between Janine and the storekeeper, I find myself carrying away a package containing not a bedspread, but something like a garish afghan that has been lying on a shelf for years. Janine is always delighted at her bargain, but it often makes me stop and think. During my marriage I have also inherited a great deal—copper urns, pottery jardinieres, battered fireplace equipment—never from someone's last will and testament but always from the living. I should have foreseen this when Mr. Dorbinder sold us the house; I might also have recognized the beginning of this trend when the Happy Irishman pointed out the car he thought would interest us.

He was quite right. Perhaps he had known intuitively, with the almost human cunning of automobile salesmen, what Janine's reaction would be:

"*Ah, oui!*" she cried. "*Voilà* the car I want. It is almost as *sympathique* as the French ones."

It was a Model A coupe, vintage 1930; black—painted black several times, apparently with a hairbrush. Its thin fenders trembled even though no breeze blew. It was tall, boxy, with a patched tarpaulin for a roof; and a bent bumper that gave the front end, with its oversized headlights, a goggle-eyed grin. The best I could say for the car was that it went with the house. Its price was a little lower than a good bicycle.

When I started the engine, the cylinders sounded as if they were working at cross-purposes. The muffler seemed to gasp in horror, then chuckle wickedly. But the car ran; that much I could not deny.

We concluded the affair with the Happy Irishman and Janine climbed into the front seat.

"I am very content with the automobile," Janine said. "Is this what you call . . . an éclair?"

"No," I said, "it is not an éclair. Or a cream puff. Or even a *crêpe suzette*."

"Still," Janine said, "it is *un petit* car, *très gentil*. And also reasonable. Perhaps it is a sacrifice?"

"For us," I said, "it is definitely that."

We put the car to work without delay. A man's affection for his first car, they say, is as bittersweet and lingering as a first love affair, and I found this true. The horn sounded like the distant cawing of one of Janine's kraus, but this soon became a most agreeable noise. Starting it demanded an elaborate series of steps in addition to turning the key: setting the choke, pumping the gas pedal, and kicking the firewall to get the electrical system working; I grew proud that no one else knew the secret combination. But it was Janine who gave the car a life of its own. She spoke of it always as

"he" and had the habit of giving one of the fenders a friendly pat after completing a successful run.

Our car was unquestionably more workhorse than cream puff. Since the headlights blinked out whenever we went over a bump, and the brakes operated as efficiently as a stick dragged along the ground, we never dared go long distances. During the early days in our house, we used the car mainly to haul boards, rolls of linoleum, cans of paint, and bags of cement. Another of its important duties was the weekly shopping trip for groceries.

Living with my parents, Janine had never been fond of shopping. The crowds and the size of the local supermarket made her feel she was in the Gare Saint-Lazare.

"It's true, Rainette," she said. "With the high ceilings and long passages, I expect that a train will drive up any minute. Besides, there is too much all at once. In France, when we need bread we go to the bakery; if we want meat we go to the beef butcher, the pork butcher, or the horse-meat butcher; for milk we go to the *laiterie* and for cakes to the *pâtisserie.*

"But here, everything is all together. One picks up a loaf of bread and—who knows?—on the next counter will be a big fish staring out . . . or paper handkerchiefs. No, Rainette, it is not proper to mix the *pâtisserie* with the *laiterie* and the *boucherie.*

"Then in France, one enters a shop, shakes hands with the *proprietaire* and has a nice conversation. This is impossible with the big machines that go *choc-choc-choc* and only give you the count . . ."

Janine now looked forward to marketing and painstakingly wrote out weekly lists in a French script almost undecipherable to me. The groceries she required were equally mysterious. According to her notes, we were to buy:

"Crakers—the kind I like;" "1 box of cooked tomatoes, red and blue;" or "pillows, small." I found out later that these items were, respectively, fig newtons, a can of stewed tomatoes—colors referring to the label—and shredded wheat biscuits.

At the market her first stop was invariably the gadget shelves. She examined the patented vegetable choppers, corkscrews, bottle stoppers, magnetized can openers, and we seldom left without one or two in our basket.

If Janine originally looked on the supermarket as a train station with vegetables, she soon behaved as if she were in her own kitchen. There was not an item on the shelves she did not pick up, sniff, shake or, if possible, taste. She plunged her hands to the very bottom of the deep freezers and shuffled the icy cartons until I feared she would be frostbitten.

Janine handled the shopping carts with the frenzied precision of a Parisian cab driver. She skidded around the pyramids of canned goods, took the hairpin curve at fruits and vegetables without blinking an eye, and spun to a stop in front of the meat counters.

Wherever she went, Janine attracted attention, usually in the form of appreciative males. But the looks she collected from the women shoppers, especially after rocketing her basket between two others approaching from the opposite direction, were of a different type.

Racing after her, I pleaded with her to slow down or make hand signals.

"Is not America the country of speed?" Janine said. "*Alors*, I follow the customs."

From the aisles, she careened enthusiastically to the check-out line, happily anticipating the coupons offering a ten-cent refund on a certain bar of soap, the certificates entitling her to a pair of scissors with each can of beans bought

on alternate Tuesdays, and the free crockery the management offered with each purchase over ten dollars. I had believed somehow that the French sense of economy would save Janine from this pitfall of marketing, but I was mistaken.

"What you do not comprehend, Rainette," Janine said, looking proudly at the water glasses she had received at the checking counter, "is that it is all free. These market-supers must be extravagant to give away such things, when one must buy groceries anyhow."

"But look at what we bought," I said. "Twice as much as we need for this week and next week too."

"*Bien sûr*," Janine said. "I did it expressly. This is the week for glasses, and you know we have need of them."

"We could have bought them separately in a store," I said, "without fifty pounds of groceries."

Janine sighed. "You still do not comprehend."

"In the long run," I tried to tell her, "the glasses are expensive if you buy things you don't need to get them."

"I will ask you one question, Rainette," Janine said. "If something is free, how can it cost? Now, next week there will be egg cups, of which we need a large quantity . . ."

I said no more and packed the dozens of canned goods in the car. I knew I would never see them again, for Janine made a practice of storing them in the cellar in case of emergency and forgetting about them. As far as I know, none of these cans have been touched. But we do have a large number of egg cups.

Among all the groceries there were mainly two that puzzled her: the white powder that turned into mashed potatoes when mixed with water; and the aerosol cans of whipped cream.

Before I could explain the latter, Janine took a bowl from the cupboard and began spraying the whipped cream into it.

"These boxes are not very practical," she said, "for they demand a long time to empty and it was impossible to use the can opener."

Janine came to grief on only one item of the American diet. I realized it as soon as I entered the house one evening to find the kitchen filled with smoke. Janine's eyes were red, and not only from the acrid clouds.

"The market-supers are *voleurs,* criminals, to sell such a thing. The steak I was preparing for you now is ruined, and all the fault of this!"

The frying pan was scorched black, and in the center stood a shapeless lump of peanut butter.

"How was I to know, Rainette? Does it not say butter on the jar? *Le beurre* . . . surely I can read English. And it was so much cheaper than cow's butter . . ."

It took a long while for the aroma of peanuts to disappear. But I did not mind too much. It reminded me of a circus.

"*Quand même,* Rainette," Janine said, "with the exception of this terrible butter, the Americans are very clever. There is nothing that does not come in its little jar or box; and after you are through, you need only send away the top and receive a present. Thus, while one eats, one may also grow rich."

We did not grow rich, but for a time it seemed that whenever I suggested buying anything, Janine rummaged through a drawer full of premium offers and advertisements to see whether we could get it with boxtops.

She acquired stockings, handkerchiefs, perfume samples, and if I had not objected I am sure she would have sent away for dog whistles, plastic rocket ships, and adjustable compass rings. Janine became a firm believer in the power of the premium. Only once did she trust it too far.

I had given her some letters to mail, then forgotten about

them. A few days later, they came back to me with "Insufficient Postage" blazoned across the front. At first I could not understand why—until I noticed the upper right-hand corner of each envelope, where Janine had affixed a supermarket trading stamp.

# CHAPTER 13

Shopping, for all its opportunities to acquire free eggcups and dishes, was a secondary activity. Our main task was to make the house livable. The house had its own ideas about this. According to Janine, the house had become lazy. To me, it was not so much a question of laziness as a deliberate attempt to frustrate us and keep us from meddling in its private affairs. If the house was something of a scarecrow, it was a scarecrow with a checkered past.

Five different locks secured the front door: two bolts, a chain device, a Yale lock, and an old-fashioned latch. I knew little about the neighborhood, but I could not believe we needed so much protection. When I began removing these barriers, I understood they had been put there not to keep out intruders—but to conceal holes in the front door. I replaced them carefully.

This was only one of the lesser secrets of the house. What seemed a simple job of removing a crooked piece of molding and tacking it on straight turned out to be a major project—because, in some subtle way, the molding sup-

ported an area of wainscoting which in turn kept the kitchen door from falling down. A board nailed for no apparent reason in a corner of the living room actually shored up a part of the wall—as we discovered when we took it down.

Pascuccio had not, as Mrs. Lamotta claimed, merely grown tired of working. I looked on him as a philosopher who had grasped the complex balance of forces that held the house together—and realized the wisdom of leaving well enough alone.

Janine did not share my attitude. "After all, Rainette, does not the house belong to us? Then it must do as we say. I have med up my mine."

Until then, I had never appreciated the significance of a Frenchwoman with her mind made up. Clearing the grounds was nothing compared to the reconstruction and rehabilitation program Janine launched indoors. Even my parents, aunt, and sister were pressed into service. She painted, sawed, hammered, and plastered until I was exhausted and begged for mercy.

"Consider the money we save," Janine said. "And consider how much value the house will have when we sell it."

Our work unquestionably saved money we did not have in the first place; I wondered whether it would offset the bills for my hospital room after Janine completed her projects.

Janine disregarded my battered thumbs and aching back. And she had the keen intuition of an army sergeant when it came to detecting my malingering. I could not plead fatigue or a hard day at the office.

"You Americans do not know how to work," Janine said, "like you do not know how to walk, but always drive in the automobile. Outside, Rainette, you can be an American, but in the house you are a Frenchman—which means, among other things, you must work."

One person, at least, agreed with Janine's joy-through-work policy: not I, but Felix, whose property adjoined ours. He had come over to pay his respects shortly after we moved in—interested, no doubt, in seeing who had been foolish enough to buy Pascuccio's house. If he came out of curiosity, he stayed with enthusiasm.

Short, stocky, with powerful shoulders and a face weathered almost black, Felix made a living from collecting scrap iron. Hoisting a disconnected gas range to his truck was child's play for him. He watched our efforts at installing the sink in the upstairs kitchen, then motioned us aside. He heaved it in his arms like a sack of potatoes and set it down in place.

As other men make a hobby of stamp collecting or fishing, Felix relaxed by working. Finishing the chores around his own place, he would stroll over to ours—usually finding me idling near the shack, where I often went to escape Janine's activities indoors.

Felix and I would stand meditatively, hands behind our backs, for a few moments. Felix chewed an extinguished cigar and let his eyes wander critically over the grounds.

"Needs hoeing," Felix said, squirting tobacco juice toward the garden.

I nodded. "I guess it does."

Felix left me, only to return, seconds later, with a massive implement that could have come out of the Stone Age. "Used it to mix cement," Felix said. "But it's got a nice heft to it."

He passed the hoe to me. It was all I could do to lift it. After one or two rows, I had to cling to the hoe to keep from falling into the vegetables.

"You really got to go after it," Felix said, taking the hoe from my blistered hands, "like this . . ."

I could not bear to watch as Felix manipulated the hoe

as if it weighed no more than a golf club. My turn came again all too soon.

As I used the perspiration from my forehead to cauterize the blisters on my palms, Felix discovered several dead branches that should be sawed off.

We pruned the trees for a while, and when that was done Felix remembered a bad crack in the pavement. "Won't take any time to fix," he said. "Mix about fifty pounds of cement, shouldn't need any more."

But by then Janine had missed me:

"Rainette!" she would call from the window. "You have had time enough to rest. Now I am sawing a big piece of wood, and you must come immediately to operate the saw."

When I had cut through the final inch of timber, I was sure to hear Felix's voice advising me that the cement was ready and drying fast. I had better hurry if I did not want a stone slab in the middle of the lawn.

Felix usually ended up doing most of the work himself. Without him, I knew I would have been totally lost. But between Janine and Felix, I spent my evenings in an atmosphere of sawdust, lumber, and iron piping. How Janine accomplished what she did, I never understood. She revealed herself as a carpenter, painter, and civil engineer. In one spot where the floor sagged, she tore up the boards and put in a joist which, by my calculation, would never hold. It did. Using an old spatula, she plastered over the exposed lath in the bedroom. By all rights, it should have come sloshing down on our heads. It dried firmly. At that point, had she suggested rebuilding the entire house, I would have believed her capable of it.

I was ready to call a truce. As far as I was concerned, the house had been improved to the limit of human capacity. But Janine wanted to consolidate her victory. The last pocket of resistance was the chimney. It was not the type

of chimney that ended in a fireplace. Originally it had been designed for a pot-bellied stove to heat the living room. Pascuccio had plastered it up and covered it with wallpaper. It looked like an elongated mummy case, and Janine found it intolerable. She had already begun the attack when I came home one evening. In her official white smock, she chipped away mortar with an insignificant-looking tack hammer.

"I was going to wait for you, Rainette," she said, "but I med up my mine. This *cheminée* must come down today."

She had already demolished a good part of it. From waist level up, most of the bricks had been knocked out, and the upper part of the chimney stood supported by a thin column. An indefinable uneasiness came over me. The upper section of the chimney passed through the living room and from there to the roof. If Janine pulled out the remaining bricks, there was nothing in the world to hold it up.

"You do not comprehend, Rainette," she said with an air of pity. "Are not all these bricks solid? We take them out one by one and there will be no difficulty."

I insisted something was wrong with the plan, although I could not deny that the chimney looked solid enough.

"You are always worry," Janine said. "When I put the cabinets in the kitchen, you were sure they would fall down. And the door that came off—I made the correct reparations? *Eh bien,* let me occupy myself with the *cheminée.*"

She picked up the hammer and knocked away the mortar. She turned to me with a smile of triumph. At that moment I heard a distant groaning and rumbling; in another second came a sound like a train of boxcars. A bombardment of rubble spattered the room; loose bricks streamed into the living room like so much coal down a chute.

That night we went to bed against a background of shell craters and blitzkrieg. Felix, who had seen the chimney wiggling on the roof, had come over to investigate. Since the whole structure of bricks had plummeted, the chimney had to be demolished immediately to avoid further damage. Felix brought a ladder and climbed to the roof while Janine and I cleared away the rubble. When we finished, the place where the chimney had stood was a gaping shaft, and the rest of the room looked as if it had gone through a saturation raid.

Felix promised to return early next morning to help us patch the roof, and we went to bed. The brick dust had infiltrated our sheets. The breeze sighed gently through the hole in the ceiling. Janine slept peacefully, a smile on her face, in the relaxation of one whose work has been well completed. I did not close my eyes, wondering how I had ever been persuaded that a chimney could be removed from the bottom up.

The answer was simple. Janine had made up her mind. Starting on that premise, there was no reason to suppose she would be deterred by such a minor consideration as the law of gravity.

Working on the house took up most of our time and it seemed, for days on end, Janine was never without a daub of paint on her nose and plaster in her hair.

Still, the gaunt, strained look that lingered after her stay in the hospital had gone. She laughed easily and, when she was not issuing instructions on how to lay down linoleum or paint the window frames, she sang songs we last heard in Paris.

Now that we were alone together, I expected Janine would go back to speaking French entirely. But she reserved it for subjects too complicated to figure out quickly—or

when she was angry at me; the rest of the time she preferred English—her own brand. She never stopped being puzzled that no one mistook her for an American:

"Now I thank, Rainette, I know the English as well than you. But why can I not full anybody?"

Janine's accent was not the only thing that betrayed her. As much as her words, her gestures carried a made-in-France label. In Paris, I had grown so used to them that I did not really see them. In my parents' house we adopted them as unconsciously as her manner of speaking. Now, in a house still strange to me, I rediscovered them.

Had Janine decided to avoid the use of words, there would have been few emotions she could not have expressed with her hands. The first was the familiar Gallic signal of pleasure, performed with one hand, fingertips together, brought to her lips, then pulled away sharply. It was an inimitable movement, and Janine had it down to a fine point. She could demonstrate rising degrees of approval by pressing her fingertips tighter and increasing the distance her hand traveled.

While this gesture applied to anything Janine liked, she used a special one to indicate a particularly good meal. At first glance it looked like an attack of indigestion, for Janine patted her heart with several little taps and murmured, "*Petit coeur,*" but its meaning was just the opposite.

Janine summed up disapproval and annoyance by passing the back of her hand along her cheek, as though scraping an imaginary beard. Like the fingertips movement, it went through varying degrees. A few short passes signified boredom—uncomfortable, not too serious; but when Janine began tugging an invisible beard that stretched as long as Methuselah's, it was time to stop whatever we were doing or leave wherever we happened to be—and do so immediately.

She reinforced this gesture by another one. In French, it meant "*ficher le camp*" and in English, "*scram!*" It was a chopping movement of one hand across the outstretched and wiggling fingers of the other. She applied it to me during housecleaning when I stumbled over her water bucket, stepped on the mop, and knocked over a few eggcups.

Surprise—good or bad—and any kind of excitement Janine expressed by shaking the fingers of one hand, as if she had been rapped on the knuckles. But she used this gesture so often that it became punctuation—a crescendo mark or double-forte sign during conversation.

To show complete distrust or disbelief, Janine had only to point an index finger at her eye. The greater the disbelief, the more it looked as though she were about to blind herself.

With or without verbal accompaniment—a series of "*Ah, ça!*" or "*Ça, alors*"—Janine's gestures, augmented by a gamut of facial expressions, were distinct and unmistakable. But I could never get accustomed to her system of hand-waving. When she waved good-by she was actually beckoning; when she beckoned she meant good-by. By the time I had these movements clear in my mind, she had translated them. I realized this one day when I left the house to go to the barber shop. Janine came to the porch when I was a couple hundred yards away and waved at me. Touched by her distress at my leaving the house, even for so short a time, I waved back at her and kept going. Home again, I was surprised to find her out of sorts.

"Why did you not come, Rainette?" she asked reproachfully. "I wanted you to help me move the sofa."

This time, I told her, she could not confuse me. I had finally grasped the difference between a French "come back" sign and an "*au revoir.*"

"Oh, Rainette," Janine said with discouragement, "could you not see that I was wevving to you in English?"

Janine's reconstruction program was near its end when Mr. Dorbinder paid us a visit. Passing through the neighborhood, he wanted to say hello and see if we were, by this time, in the market for a different house.

"I can speak frankly," Mr. Dorbinder said, "now that settlement is over. A very nice property has just come into the office; we haven't advertised it yet, and I wanted you people to get first chance. I won't have any trouble selling it, but I couldn't think of anyone who needed it more."

But when the real-estate agent saw what we had accomplished, he was more complimentary. He looked in amazement at the laundry shed, now turned into a kitchen, at the repainted rooms, and the half-completed apartment upstairs.

"At first I thought you might want to get rid of the place," he said. "With luck, you could have got your money back. But you don't need to worry. You could sell it right now at a profit."

That night, Janine and I took out the budget book. We were still far below what we needed, and I doubted that the profit we might gain from selling the house now would make that much difference. The apartment was nearly finished; we would do better to rent it and live downstairs until we were ready to go back to France.

Next day I telephoned Mr. Dorbinder, told him our decision, and promised to let him know whenever we wanted to sell.

"*Oui*, Rainette," Janine said. "We must now make the grand effort to finish the repairs. It is the apartment that will take us to Paris."

Even Janine's enthusiasm had a physical limit. As the Philadelphia summer approached, the cold, damp humidity changed to hot, damp humidity. Too tired to stick to full evenings of do-it-yourself, we threw down our tools, sat on

the porch and swatted mosquitoes, or strolled around the neighborhood.

Walking down our narrow street to the elm, I could easily believe someone in the real-estate business had made an error. It was the only area within miles that had open fields. A few minutes' walk to one end of our street led to a long stretch of woods and a creek winding through the valley below. The church and its burying ground stood at the other end. A few blocks north, a barbershop and bakery made up the business district; the other side of the street was dominated by Goozik's Hotel, a ramshackle frame building with a bar on the first floor.

The hotel part consisted of three rooms on the upper floor, occupied by pensioners from the textile mill. We stopped in at Goozik's Hotel during one of our evening rambles. Over the display of bottles, an enormous stuffed moose head smiled down on Goozik, stout and red-faced, who joked with his customers. Two pensioners, each with long, grizzled mustaches, hunched over a table in the corner. At another table, a girl with braided blond hair held hands with a young man in a checkered cap. Through the smoke I recognized Felix standing at the bar. He waved and offered to buy us a drink.

"I would like a glass of Dubonnet," Janine said.

Goozik asked her to say it again, then frowned and shook his head.

"A vermouth-cassis, *alors?*" Janine suggested.

"Lady," Goozik said, "I don't know what it is, but I can tell you for sure we don't serve it."

Felix ordered beer for all of us. After the first swallow, my throat burned and my eyes watered.

"It's Mulligan beer," Felix explained. "With red pepper juice. Good for you. It cools you off in the summer and warms you up in the winter."

Through my tears, I could see that Janine finished her Mulligan beer without difficulty; before my glass was half empty, Felix ordered another round. "What is wrong?" Janine asked, as my face turned brilliant red. "Have you no longer thirst?"

I had thirst enough, but no throat to swallow. To make up for it, the size of my head had doubled, and I barely heard the voice of Felix ordering a few more rounds. Janine led me home that night; the trip seemed to take an extraordinarily long time.

"So you see, Rainette," Janine said, unlacing my shoes, "the advantage of being French. We have drunk the wine for many years. This Mulligan's beer is only for children; it is *dommage* we did not order something stronger. *Quand même,* it is a *sympathique* little *bistro.* Although I prefer the French drinks, we must try another *specialité de la maison* the next time."

Janine became fond not only of Goozik's, but of the entire neighborhood. "But wet and see," she warned. "You Americans cannot leave a piece of empty terrain alone. In the blinking of an eye, we will wek up and find houses all around us."

I was not worried about it. If Reillytown had been spared this long, it was probably stubborn enough to hold out against anything. Besides, from a business point of view, the community was unquestionably on the wrong side of the tracks.

"Tracks?" Janine asked. "How can you say tracks? There is hardly even the autobus."

By midsummer, working on a slowed-down schedule, we put the finishing touches on the apartment. As a landlord, I found it irresistible, with big, sunny rooms and a kitchen that turned out neater than our own. The bathroom over-

looked a magnificent view of the mulberry trees, the vegetable garden, and Felix's scrap-iron depot. The plumbing had a tendency to moan, but only when the water was turned on. However, putting myself in the place of a tenant, I wondered whether I would have enough sense of humor to live there.

Over the weekend, I drafted an advertisement. I had no space to describe the house completely, and perhaps that was all for the best, so I stressed the grounds, the private entrance, the proximity of transportation (with no details about the bus schedule). When I finished I could not decide whether I had done the house justice, or whether I would be taken to court for making fraudulent claims.

There was no question in Janine's mind. The apartment was rivaled only by the Hotel Georges-Cinq in Paris. "You have not said enough," she told me when I showed her what I had written. "You have forgotten how nice the bells ring from the church, and the woods, the ease of obtaining a cut-hair, the fresh bread from the bakery—it is not French bread but, *enfin*, it is better than most."

It would be better, I said, to keep all these extra inducements as a surprise; the tenants would find them out for themselves.

"Very well," Janine agreed, "you comprehend the American advertising better than I. But you are sure there is nothing they will take badly? You wrote nothing about the tracks?"

"No," I said, "they will also find that out for themselves."

# CHAPTER 14

The advertisement disappointed me when I saw how much it looked like all the others. The glowing picture I tried to paint was reduced to a few lines of abbreviations. The side stairway which Janine and I labored to repair became a cold-looking *pvt. entr.* The *lge. grds., kit., bedr. & b. nr. transp.* conveyed nothing of the appeal I had imagined. But Janine proudly clipped out the ad, put on her newest dress, and waited for telephone calls.

She received two the first day: one from my mother, to find out if anyone had rented the apartment yet; and one from me, asking the same question. I came home to find Janine slightly discouraged but still optimistic:

"The advertisement is in the middle of the page," she said. "*Naturellement,* people start reading from the top, and it must take them a long time to find ours. Tomorrow, Rainette, you must telephone the journal and make them to put our house first."

Later next morning Janine called, telling me not to in-

convenience the newspaper editor because a lot of people were going to visit the apartment. "Tonight, you will see how everything is arranged."

When Janine met me at the door that evening I knew that everything had not been arranged.

"It was a terribill day, Rainette! First came a lady with a great many people on the balcony who looked in all the closets and opened all the windows—and you know what happens with the window in front, Rainette, because the cords do not march correctly.

"So, after I put the iodine and bandages on her fingers, I assured her we would have the cords fixed. But this lady was very angry and kept shaking her head and giving strange blinks at the window—and said she did not like the apartment at all. Just because of a silly little window that falls down. You would think I ask her to put her head in *la guillotine.*

"Now I was sorry for her finger, but I did not regret when she went away. That lady had a bad disposition and ungrateful too, for she did not even thank me for the bandage.

"Then came another couple, but as soon as they were in the apartment, the man began snizzing. His wife asked if we had roses, and I said *bien sûr* and showed them my beautiful garden. It was so wonderful, because the window was now open and all the aromas came in. And the man turned even more red in the face and began to cry. They did not look around, but left right away. His wife said he had the allergies against roses, which I thank was very insulting of him.

"Next came a very severe couple who thought they might rent it until the lady said, 'Oh, Charlie, look. These floors are not hardwood, and you know how I hate anything else.' I told them the floors were very hard and stamped my foot to prove it. But they went away anyhow. And—Rainette,

there is a little crack in the floor where I stamped, so you must be careful not to fall in it.

"And a lot of the people who called did not arrive, which was most impolite of them. And nobody wants the apartment at all," Janine said, bursting into tears.

I was sure it simply depended on approach and decided to take charge of the next prospects myself. When a few couples arrived later in the evening, I made a point of showing them our genuine antique floorboards, inhaling deeply, and commenting on the invigorating qualities of the neighborhood air. But this wave of apartment hunters did not suffer from allergies and had no interest in flooring. For one couple the essential things were privacy and quiet—but they chose to reveal this just as Felix unloaded his day's collection of scrap iron. The local fire brigade was also active that night.

When all the prospective tenants went home, leaving the apartment still unrented, I began to wonder whether I was really cut out to be a landlord. I told Janine there was no sense in plaguing ourselves, we could sell the house the following year and would still not be too badly off.

Janine shook her head. "And next year it will be something else, and the year after that . . . No, Rainette, we will somehow find the *locataires*. I have med up my mine."

From the look of determination on Janine's face, I would not have been surprised to learn she intended to shanghai an unsuspecting tenant and hold him for ransom. Fortunately, this was unnecessary. After a few more days of advertising, a young couple, Bob and Elise, decided to rent the upstairs.

As a newly arrived landlord, I believed in a strictly business type of arrangement. However worthy the cause, I still felt vaguely embarrassed at having to rent out part of the house. The more distance between our apartment and the

second floor, I thought, the better. But Bob and Elise were our own age, friendly and agreeable, and we soon tired of addressing each other formally. The solemn procedure of rent collecting turning into a sociable visit. Janine, usually shy with strangers, drank morning coffee with Elise. Bob helped me rig up a laundry pulley between the shack and a mulberry tree, weeded the garden along with us, and even cut the grass now and then.

There were times, however, when I wondered whether Bob and Elise's arrival was a blessing or a curse. On one hand, they helped a great deal to bolster the back-to-Paris fund. On the other, they brought a radio and a television set.

Television was still a novelty then, and we would spend several evenings a week staring at the flickering blue screen in Bob and Elise's living room. Most of the programs seemed to be boxing or wrestling matches, and Janine screamed every time a solid uppercut landed or someone got tossed out of the ring in a flying mare. But whenever I suggested leaving, she only settled deeper into her chair. By the time the wrestling ended, Elise had made coffee, and Bob had switched on a double feature of old movies. Finally, eyes red and blurred, we groped our way down the stairs.

Of the two of us, I was usually more able to break away from the hypnosis. But it saved me no sleep, for Janine was sure to wake me up to tell me about the movie she had just seen. She loved travelogues and costume dramas, but cowboy pictures invariably ruined her temper.

"America is the land of *le cowboy*," she complained, "but I never rendered count to myself they were so wicked."

I could not imagine how she got this impression. I tried to point out that movie cowboys were as gallant as Chevalier Bayard himself; they never used profanity in front of a lady

("Which is a good lesson for you, Rainette," Janine inserted), were kind to their horses, never shot anyone in the back, and always gave their enemy time to draw his gun.

"It is not all that," Janine said. "I am not deranged by all these *coups de revolver*, and it meks no difference to me if one cowboy shoots another. What I cannot support is when they shoot the Andians. It is always the Andians, no matter what else happens.

"Tonight, *par exemple*, there was a gold mine and some species of robbers—but suddenly the cowboys forget all about that, and the next thing they are doing is fighting with Andians! It was a terribill combat, and I was sure the Andians would win because there were so many of them. But the cowboys never stopped shooting and making the poor Andians fall into the cactus.

"No, I am very angry at these cowboys for their conduct. Fortunately, there will be another *histoire de cowboys* tomorrow which I must see."

I could not understand why, if Janine disliked cowboys as much as she claimed, she was impatient for the next western.

"Because, Rainette," she explained, "there is the law of averages and one of these days it is not *les cowboys* but the Andians who will gain the victory—and I intend to be there when it happens."

While television interrupted my sleep and afflicted me with blind staggers when I had to get up in the morning, the effect of the radio was less obvious but even more insidious. In my parents' house, Janine and I paid little attention to the radio. The singing commercials from her balcony days had contributed.

"Besides," Janine told me, "it is mainly the squeeze-shows with questions that are *trop difficile pour moi*. And it is no better when they play the American songs. In

France, *au moins*, we have the songs about all kinds of things—about the weather, and traffic, the ocean, and *naturellement* we have the *chansons d'amour*, too.

"But here it is not always easy to know the difference, because most of the time it is someone saying 'Bop-bop' or some other species of language; or else they make such funny noises like echoes, or as if they were gravely *malade* and not in love at all."

In our own house, we had been too busy to get into the habit of radio listening and turned on our set infrequently. Elise, however, was an ardent soap-opera fan, and I blame her exclusively for introducing Janine to the *opéra à savon.*

At a certain mysterious hour during the day, the two girls stopped whatever they happened to be doing and devoted all their attention to the newest installment. Luckily for me, the soap operas were broadcast on weekdays when I was at the office. My knowledge of them only filtered through Janine, and I never felt that I had a clear idea of what was going on.

"Sometimes I do not comprehend, either," Janine said, "but it is most interesting, nevertheless. I regret I did not hear this opera when it first started, because then I might have known the secret."

"The secret?" I asked.

"*Oui*, the secret of Samantha Pair-keens. It must be terribill, because long ago she was a lady of great *richesse*, but now she lives in some species of corners with her old uncle and she never wants anyone to know what happened. This makes everything very difficult for her, especially with her fiancé, Lord Randolph, because there are so many misunderstandings.

"Now there is also another woman, the enemy of Samantha Pair-keens, who does not love Lord Randolph but wants to marry him. But Samantha Pair-keens is now on trial in

the court because of trying to steal Lord Randolph's invention—which she really was not doing, but only to protect him against a band of gangsters.

"So it is all very *triste*, because Lord Randolph does not know whether to believe Samantha Pair-keens or her enemy. But Samantha Pair-keens cannot tell him all the truth—I think it is a question of that atrocious secret. But even Elise does not know what this might be, and she has been listening for many years."

Hardly a day passed without Janine giving me a full report of Samantha Perkins' trial, of what Lord Randolph said, and what the announcer hinted at. I began to feel as I had in the days of John Smith and Janine's grammar book. This time it was worse. There was only one of John Smith, but the characters on the radio were infinite.

I knew them all: poor old Uncle Bart, the only person who really knew what was going on, but who was afflicted with a strange amnesia which made him completely useless to everybody. The other woman, Gloria, was an obvious fortune hunter but fatally beautiful; despite his better intentions, Lord Randolph could not seem to resist her. And there was an unending stream of minor characters, of plots, subplots, intrigues, counterintrigues. But Janine somehow kept them all straight, and I suspected that part of her mind must have resembled an electronic data processor.

I could always tell when things were going badly for Samantha—and they usually were. Janine served dinner with a preoccupied air, a frown, or a curious attack of absentmindedness.

One day I came home to find her thoroughly downcast. It was Samantha, of course.

"The *opéra à savon* will soon be finished," Janine said mournfully. "Samantha Pair-keens has just had an accident of automobiles, and it is impossible for her to survive. Even

Uncle Bart has given up hope. So I suppose they will end it now."

Janine brightened when she learned it was against the rules for the heroine to die, and that somehow Samantha Pair-keens would recover—if only to meet a new catastrophe.

But her interest in soap opera faded as suddenly as it had begun. At dinner one evening I found something strangely lacking, then realized it was Janine's account of the daily installment. When I asked her about it, she only shrugged.

"Oh, I do not listen any more, Rainette. It was becoming much too sad, and I will never know what the secret is."

I breathed a sigh of relief, until she added:

"Instead, I have decided to not waste my time. I now study to be a barber."

# CHAPTER 15

The first thing I said was "No." I pictured Janine in a white coat, wielding a straight razor and shaving brush, and I told her I would not tolerate my wife being a lady barber, to be ogled by an assortment of men smoking cigars and reading old magazines.

Janine looked at me tolerantly. "It is not what you call a lady barber, but a barber for ladies. *Une coiffeuse.* I learn the haircutting and how to make permanent undulations. The sister-in-law of Mrs. Lamotta says I would be a very good coiffeuse."

I have come to understand that no matter how it may seem at first hearing, nothing Janine says is really a non-sequitur. At times I have had to look far below the surface before finding a trace of connection between what she says and why she says it. But this was too deep. I could see no reason why the sister-in-law of Mrs. Lamotta, who in turn was the sister of the wife of the former owner of our house, should suggest hairdressing to Janine.

"That is only because you never listen to me," Janine

said. "The sister-in-law of Mrs. Lamotta is a coiffeuse where I get my hairs cut, and she wants to teach me. It is a most profitable business, and we can make our savings even faster . . ."

The ghost of Judy haunted me. Remembering Janine's dressmaking days, I said "No" again.

"Rainette, I promise," Janine said, crossing her heart, "no one will come to derange you. It is not like the dresses at all, because I will not do it in the house. And it would be so much fun, Rainette . . ."

I knew in advance I couldn't win; the best I could hope for was a negotiated truce. On my side, I agreed that Janine could learn all she wanted about permanent undulations—but under no circumstances was she to clutter up the house with clients while I was there. She was not to experiment on her own hair, but find some unsuspecting victim outside of the family; above all, she was not to experiment on me.

But the man who compromises eventually loses everything he bargained to get, and I was no exception. Janine's promise to me had obviously been made with all fingers and toes crossed. Before I realized what had happened, our first floor was transformed into a beauty salon. Between barbering and dressmaking, I had little choice. I could not decide whether it was worse being surrounded by women in slips or women in sheets, plus the aroma of waving lotions. As with dressmaking, Janine began with my mother, aunt, and sister. Unfortunately, hair takes a while to grow; after she had cut and rearranged their coiffures in every imaginable way, she was obliged to seek elsewhere.

I shall never forget the day I saw Janine in short, cropped hair. Instead of the long, dark tresses I had so admired, there was—nothing. I found myself in the bedroom with a new-look brunette, attractive, obviously of foreign nationality—but a total stranger and possibly a boy.

"You will never comprehend style," Janine sighed, "so it is best for you not to pay any attention and not make silly remarks."

If Janine's transformation shocked me, it was nothing compared to my feelings when she scrutinized my own hair and mentioned that it was growing a little long.

I agreed and said I had been planning to go to the barber-shop. Janine looked at me in horror:

"Barber shop? But the barber shop is here, Rainette. Why must you pay money to someone else for haircutting? That is very uneconomical when I can cut your hairs gratuitously."

I sympathized with the sheep who has been outwitted, caught, flung down and sheared. Janine brought out a small black chest filled with saw-bladed scissors, clippers, rat-tailed combs and brushes. She assured me she would not need to use all of them on my head.

"Do not be worry," Janine soothed. "I will cut the hairs exactly as you demand."

I had always been fussy about my hair. For years I had gone to the same barber, for he was the only one patient enough to snip wherever I directed, to cut the sideburns at precisely the right point, then go over the whole job again—and submit to my criticism that it didn't look right. When I felt Janine's scissors take a mighty bite across my crown, I knew those happy days had gone.

She circled me, fretting to herself, and studying the top of my head. "I do not understand," she murmured, "why a man's hairs are so difficult to cut. With ladies, I have no trouble . . . but here it is much too short . . . now I must cut the other side to match."

Finally she shook out the towel tied around my neck and stepped back. "*Voilà!* That is a very attractive style for you, Rainette, much better than the long hairs hanging down

your neck. Now you have a happier look and not so thin. Yes, Rainette, I like you much better in a screwcut."

I put my hand to my head and felt something like a Turkish towel; underneath it were the bones of my skull. But it no longer mattered to me whether I should be the laughingstock of my friends, lose a promotion at the office, and spend the next two weeks in a cave.

"Do not complain," Janine said. "You are very lucky, because there are those who are more bald than you are, and their hairs will never grow back. Next time I try something different."

I looked in the mirror she had hidden from me. Then I wished she had kept it hidden. For several days my reflection startled myself; but at least Janine had shown me upon what slender threads our vanity hangs.

Haircutting and undulations were not enough for Janine. Although she improved with practice, she felt a need to extend her knowledge of theory. "You see," she told me, "even after I learn the undulations and if I want to have my own shop, then I must pass the examinations. So you will help me to learn, Rainette."

Mrs. Lamotta's sister-in-law loaned Janine a tattered volume of cosmetology, filled with horrifying cross-sections of scalp, follicles, and epidermis. Janine, whose favorite reading spot was our bed, propped a pillow behind her head, spread her notes over the coverlet, and chewed on the end of a pencil. Every so often she woke me up so that I could ask her the questions at the end of each chapter.

After a week or so of studying, Janine began spending less and less time on the abstract principles of hairdressing. "They make everything so difficult," she complained. "I do not thank it matters whether I remember all I read in this book. If I ever decide to get my license, it will be time enough to learn."

I had no doubt that once Janine made up her mind, she would have no trouble handling whatever the state licensing bureau might offer. But there was one evening when I wished she had paid a little more attention to her theory.

I was coming back from the bakery with material for a late snack when I noticed a large, heavy man glancing uncertainly at our house. I asked what he wanted, and he turned to me furiously.

"That French girl . . . she lives around here. Which house? Just tell me where, that's all I want to know . . ."

He had such a wild, fiercely determined look in his eye that I thought he might be a magazine or brush salesman. His fingers twitched, and the color of his face alternated between white and purple.

"I get my hands on her just once," he muttered.

"The French girl?" I asked.

"Yeah. She did it, I know she did it . . ."

"I think she lives in the next block," I pointed down the street. "About five houses from the end, toward the creek."

When he started away, I hurried into the house and bolted the door. Janine was ironing in the bedroom.

"There was a man outside," I said. "I think he wanted to murder you."

Janine never looked up; the iron passed smoothly back and forth. "I gass that was Mr. Gravichek," she said. "He lives near the church."

"I don't care where he lives," I said, "he's dangerous. What did you do to him?"

Janine folded a shirt. "Rainette, you are excited for no reason. I did nothing to him. He is worse than you are. Today Mrs. Lamotta and Mrs. Gravichek came to visit me; Mrs. Gravichek wanted me to do the hair dyeing, *c'est tout.*"

The top of my head began to feel cold. "And what happened?"

"Nothing," Janine said. "I did the hair dyeing, and it was excellent. Mrs. Gravichek got used to it because I told her it was most fashionable; perhaps the color is not exactly what I expected, but still nice even if it is a little blue."

If Janine had made a sworn enemy of Mr. Gravichek, she produced the opposite effect on the rest of Reillytown. Felix brought her baskets of ripe tomatoes, beans, peppers, and lettuce to add to the fruits of our own garden. Mr. Hunyadi, florid-faced, with an enormous mustache, made sure she had all the peaches we could eat or preserve. Garigs Owens whitewashed our porch and grew very angry when I tried to thank him. Louis Antonelli, a third cousin of Mrs. Lamotta, who lived in the crooked little row of dwellings nearby, did a thorough engine tune-up on the Model A—and disappeared before I could even ask him to come in for a drink of beer.

But these were only our immediate neighbors. As Janine's reputation as a combination dressmaker and hairdresser spread, she came to know everyone, directly or indirectly, in the area. Most of the inhabitants worked in the textile mill; since I was the only man who went in town each day, I had little chance to see anyone outside of Felix, Garigs, and the few others in the immediate vicinity. Janine became an emissary to the rest of the neighborhood, and the adventures of Samantha Pair-keens were replaced by local gossip.

Janine was completely immersed in it. She knew that the Gaslevich family was not on speaking terms with the Mahoneys, because the Mahoneys had put Mr. Gaslevich under a peace bond—the upshot of Mr. Gaslevich's threatening to break all the windows in the Mahoney house. This threat

had, in turn, come about because Mr. Mahoney, one of the mill's foremen, had bestowed a soft job in the dye-room on one of his own relatives instead of Mr. Gaslevich. Mr. Facciolo's main recreation was to stand on his front porch of an evening and sing at the top of his voice. Mrs. O'Reilly spent most of her leisure arguing with her husband. On Saturday night he had attempted to hit her on the head with a frying pan—a terrible mistake, since she outweighed him by several hundred pounds. Mrs. Barsky was in tears because her son was marrying a girl she hardly knew—and so far the girl's family had shown great reluctance to invite Mrs. Barsky's family to the wedding. On top of that, Mrs. Barsky's younger son had bought a motorcycle and was speeding up and down the streets half the night with Annetta Facciolo on the saddle behind him.

Just as I had missed out on the deeper significance of Samantha Pair-keens' activities, I did not always understand the finer points of Janine's gossip. But the hard core of it seemed to be the long-standing Lamotta-Mahoney feud, which somehow involved everyone in the neighborhood. Even there, it was not easy to follow. The Lamotta faction included the Barskys and the Gasleviches, whose in-laws and cousins had family ties with the in-laws and cousins of the Lamottas. The Mahoney faction drew its support from the Facciolos and O'Reillys—with partisans among the Aurillos and Kernickys.

Janine passed through all these lines of combat with impunity. I warned her against being involved in neighborhood tangles, for I had no desire to bring the wrath of either Lamottas or Mahoneys on my head.

"That's all right, Rainette," Janine said. "They know that I am on everybody's side."

That was true enough, although there were times when I wished Janine had not become so active in community

affairs, particularly with the Romeo and Juliet of Reilly-town: Dennis Mahoney and Bianca Facciolo. I had seen them only briefly: Dennis, a presentable, blue-eyed young man in his early twenties; Bianca, a dark, pretty girl still in her teens. But Janine had become good friends with Bianca. She knew that the two families had forbidden the marriage and, to the relief of the Mahoneys, Dennis had just gone off to the army.

"*Cette pauvre fille*," Janine said, "she is so unhappy. It is even difficult for him to write letters to her, because Monsieur Facciolo will tear them up if he sees them first. So it will be best for her friend-boy to send his letters here, and she will come and get them."

I had put up with Samantha Pair-keens, screw cuts, the risk of bodily assault, and said practically nothing; but I could not see any need for acting as a lonely hearts go-between. "You can tell Bianca," I said, "that it is a federal offense to interfere with someone's mail, and she can solve all her problems by sending her father to the penitentiary."

"But I do not thank she would like to do that," Janine said. "*Après tout*, one does not lock up one's family."

"There are times," I said, "when it might be helpful. Besides, doesn't she have her own girl friends to help her out?"

"But they do not live as close," Janine said. "And she is so *gentille* and unhappy. And it is too late now because I have already told her."

Dennis was a faithful correspondent, and my mail increased two hundred per cent. Every day or so, Bianca came around to pick up the letters, and usually drank a cup of coffee with Janine. I would see the two of them earnestly conversing in the kitchen: Bianca, mournful and melancholy; Janine, looking hardly older than her friend, playing the solemn role of adviser to the lovelorn.

While I could not be angry at either of them, I often wondered what the postman thought, delivering mail from a distant army post, the envelopes bearing S.W.A.K. and occasional amatory afterthoughts penciled below. Janine had neglected to mention that, in order to keep Bianca's secret from prying eyes, the letters would be addressed to me.

"Do not derange yourself," Janine said. "In a little while they will somehow get married. Meanwhile, *c'est tout pour l'amour.*"

The Facciolo-Mahoney romance showed no sign of cooling and I longed for the day Dennis would be discharged and stop writing letters. Despite the impression of sitting on a community powder keg, I realized Janine had been right in choosing the old house. The charm of it had begun to work on me, and it was not an unpleasant sensation.

As for the neighborhood, I had originally liked it because it had seemed forgotten and quiet. Forgotten it might have been, but as the summer passed I realized it was far from quiet—still, I liked it just as well. The day was punctuated by church bells, the footsteps of altar boys in red and white vestments who hurried past our house; the shouts of children after school; and the blasts of the whistle from the textile mill.

In the autumn nights, when even Janine wearied of television, we stretched out on the ground, still warm from the day's sunlight, and listened to the sounds of Reillytown. Past the screen of hedges, from one of the old houses across the field came the sound of Mr. Gravichek's accordion. Mr. Facciolo warmed up for his program. Behind all this was the distant tinkling of the crockery Mrs. O'Reilly threw at her husband. Young Barsky on his motorcycle zoomed

down the street, and Mrs. Facciolo's daughter screamed with delight.

"It was very nice where your parents lived," Janine told me one evening, "but too silent. As soon as it got dark, everyone locked the doors and disappeared. Here it is much more like Paris, with the noises of a little *quartier*."

Just then, from the other side of the hedge, there was a sound of feminine shrieks, scuffling, and two masculine voices exchanging profanities. Janine and I jumped up, ran to the front of the house and down the steps.

By this time lights had flashed on in all the houses. Mr. Gravichek's accordion stopped in the middle of a phrase. The street suddenly filled with gesticulating people. Felix, in shirtsleeves, appeared behind us and Bianca Facciolo waved at Janine from the crowd. Mrs. Lamotta, wearing a long yellow kimono, stood on her porch and craned her neck down the street. Bob and Elise peered from our upstairs window.

Janine left me and made her way into the crowd. She came back in a few minutes. "It is nothing. Monsieur Gaslevich has *enfin* broken a window of Monsieur Mahoney. He would have liked to break more, but Monsieur Mahoney jumped out and impeded him."

In a little while, the police car arrived. Mr. Mahoney and Mr. Gaslevich were both bundled inside, and Mr. O'Reilly seemed to be trying to convince the officers to take his wife along. After a few minutes, the street drained and was empty once more. Barsky started his motorcycle in a volley of backfiring. The accordion took up where it left off.

"Yes, Rainette," Janine sighed as we climbed the stone steps, "this is almost like Paris. If your parents' street had been like this, I would perhaps not have had so much of the sickness-home."

# CHAPTER 16

The demolition of Mr. Mahoney's window was not the only incident to shatter the evening tranquillity during that first autumn. Barsky and his motorcycle formed the nucleus for a whole organic structure of riders; I do not know whether the ruts and potholes presented a challenge and inspired Barsky and his friends to see how fast they could ride over them without crashing—or whether our street was a short cut to some distant goal. In any case, each night at ten o'clock I braced myself for an invasion of fifteen cyclists, roaring by in a long, wavering chain. Some member of Barsky's organization had shown the wisdom and foresight to store up fireworks from Fourth of July, to enhance the backfiring of the motorcycles by exploding cherry bombs and cannon crackers. One night, in a spectacular display, each rider carried a Roman candle.

Once a week the local fire brigade treated their biggest engines to an outing. They, too, preferred evenings and, like Barsky and company, made our street a regular part of their itinerary. By the time the echoes of the cherry bombs

had died away, the hook-and-ladder appeared, careening crazily over the potholes, its crew in full regalia, clinging heroically to its sides. The siren rattled our windows; Janine dropped whatever she was doing and pressed her hands over her ears; I tried to suppress the wish that Barsky and company and the fire brigade would some day meet while traveling in opposite directions.

With the exception of Bianca, whose letters from Dennis continued to arrive, it seemed that every girl within a five-mile radius got married in the church on our street. I had always believed June to be the traditional month for weddings; but throughout September and October, each Saturday morning and afternoon, the street was jammed by the cars of a wedding party. The ceremony over, the wedding guests began the traditional horn-honking pursuit of the bride and groom. The number of batteries replaced after these nuptial celebrations must have been incalculable.

By then I wondered whether our neighborhood was a calm island shaken by occasional earthquakes; or an active volcano which now and then lay dormant. I could have asked the same question about our own domestic life.

Before Janine and I married, I imagined I possessed a profound insight and understanding of matrimonial problems. I had read enough magazines and Sunday supplements to know that a married couple need only apply clear, objective reasoning to whatever minor disagreements occur. I took pride in knowing how to avoid the pitfalls of irrational bickering. Afterward, I developed the uncomfortable suspicion that the Sunday supplement articles had been written by bachelors and old maids. Or else I had overlooked the footnotes. Or perhaps, as certain insects lose their wings at maturity, a bachelor's sure knowledge of women mysteriously falls away when he marries.

Living with my parents, Janine and I had surprisingly few

disagreements. With half a dozen people under one roof, arguments usually got lost in the shuffle, bogged down by inertia, or got picked up and used secondhand by someone else. With Janine and me alone, the situation was quite different. I do not imply that we argued more than anyone else; I certainly do not imply we argued any less. With some remnants of my Olympian bachelor-type wisdom left, I expected occasional differences of opinion. I never foresaw the infinite number of forms they could take. I recognized the French genius for art, literature, pastry-cooking, and manufacturing clarinets. I had come to realize Janine's talent as a seamstress, hairdresser, carpenter, physician, and student of English. However, I had never appreciated her creative imagination, versatility, virtuosity, brilliant strategy, and generalship in the battle of the sexes.

At first I could not grasp why a simple statement of fact went unchallenged on a Wednesday, say, while the same fact on a Tuesday or Friday set off something like one of Barsky's Roman candles. If I pointed out a button missing from my shirt, chances were I might depart unscathed; the same button could also prove the starting point for an impromptu discussion of my laziness, atrocious personal habits, upbringing, and ancestry. I might admit my faulty judgment in putting the rubbish out in the midst of a rainstorm—but it only made matters worse if I mentioned that the rain had begun several hours after I had hauled the barrel down the steps. These were impenetrable mysteries; I gave up trying to solve them and concentrated on Janine's simpler aspects.

Finding the motives for our skirmishes was harder than deciding who fired the first shot at Fort Sumter. Handicapped by a married man's limited understanding of marriage, the best I could do was to study not the reasons for the battle but simply the terrain.

Certain areas of our house were Balkan hotbeds of potential strife. During our first months alone I was able to pinpoint and note their coordinates, although I could not always stay out of artillery range. First, of course, was the bathroom.

Water makes an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes and arguments. Our bathroom, small and narrow, offered a favorably moist environment. Shaving fascinated Janine—enough to bring her into the bathroom but not enough to keep her quiet until I finished. In the early days she gratified my masculine pride by standing in the doorway or perching on the rim of the tub, dangling her legs and watching me torture myself.

I soon realized that her interest flagged after a minute or two. She would decide the tub needed scrubbing, or the floor another coat of wax. If I turned away from the basin for a moment, the face I saw when I looked back at the mirror was not mine—but Janine's. Her hair needed rearranging or eyebrows had to be plucked immediately.

As I negotiated the dangerous and difficult scraping of the underjaw, neck stretched taut and vulnerable, I never failed to hear Janine's voice behind me:

"Rainette, what time is it?"

There was an electric clock in our bedroom, bought especially for Janine; to my knowledge, she has never consulted it. If I continued shaving, or held out one arm so she could see my wrist watch, I came to know her next remark all too well:

"*Très bien,* Rainette, *très bien,* since you are not spikking to me this morning."

By the time I applied styptic pencil to my neck, Janine had gone—in a silence she often maintained for the rest of the day.

When I took a bath it was always difficult to find towels.

I rarely had the foresight to check ahead of time. Dripping from the tub, I was certain to find the towel rack and the linen shelf empty. Beginning to chill, I gave an anguished call for Janine, who finally brought in a square of cloth about the size of a handkerchief.

I could use this pitiful excuse for a towel until it was sopping wet—about three seconds—or I could dance like a naked savage until the air dried my body and turned me blue in the process. If I complained, Janine looked at me reproachfully; with acrimony she reminded me that she had to do the laundry in the bathtub—and was I anxious to increase her work by using up towel after towel? It was hard enough to wash essential clothing without worrying about such luxuries as towels.

"I have never demanded a washing machine, because I am not like all the American women. It is better to work by hand and save that money for Paris. But you, Rainette, only want to make it more difficult. Perhaps you prefer to buy a washing machine? Then you would have towels day and night. *Naturellement*, we would not have enough money for the voyage—but you would have your towels. And that is all that counts with you. You do not really want to go to Paris, it is not your home; it does not derange you if I have *le mal du pays*. Perhaps you would like it better if I went to Paris alone? *Eh bien*, that is *précisement* what I shall do. If there is not enough money, it will be all your fault. I shall go *quand même* and leave you behind—which is what you want in the first place!"

Needless to say, Janine after bathing would come out swathed in towels which she must have taken from a secret hiding place. On top of that, I would find the bathroom itself lined with damp towels. How could she use so many? Allowing one for each arm and leg, several remained unaccounted for. Janine enlightened me.

"I must wash my head, *n'est-ce pas?* It requires two of your precious towels, because your American climate is so damp. Or do you want me to have the sinus?"

That left one towel. By the most liberal drying standards, there was no earthly reason for using it.

"*Mais oui,*" Janine said, "that is the towel I put on the bottom of the tub."

"Under water?" I asked.

"*Bien sûr,* to sit on when I tek my bath." She sighed with discouragement. "Oh, Rainette, you will never comprehend women. Besides, you should not complain. It is not you who does the laundry."

I could find no answer for this. It was easier, in the long run, to relinquish my claim to a towel. I went back to my savage dance. Eventually I was able to convince myself that air drying was healthful and invigorating.

Another disputed territory was my workroom. I knew it was traditional for wives to straighten up their husbands' desk and misplace everything. I was prepared for this. Janine did not do it. She made no attempt to arrange the hodgepodge of papers on my desk. Instead, she added to the mass. In the middle of a manuscript, interleaved with business correspondence, or hiding important notes, I would find Janine's seed catalogues, sheets of trading stamps, recipes, patterns clipped from magazines, half-finished letters to her mother or *la cousine* Yolande.

"But of course!" Janine said indignantly. "When you are at your office, the table is idle. Am I not permitted to sit there? You take all the plumes, ink and paper, and keep them in your room like a magpie. Not even that, because you have no magpies in this country. Now you suggest I should not write letters, and separate myself from my family. *Eh bien,* I shall write my letters nevertheless—and I shall have much to tell my mother about your selfishness."

Remembering the Sunday supplements, I explained calmly that my particular line of work demanded a complete absence of meddling with papers. Somehow this only made matters worse, and through a strange transmutation Janine, not I, became the aggrieved party. Finally I threatened to put a padlock on the door.

"If you do," Janine counterthreatened, "then I shall put a padlock on the house. You can have your meals on the steps, and all the neighbors will see how mean and *méchant* you are!"

I gave up the idea of locking my workroom, but Janine did not give up her practice of loading the table with papers —and sometimes a pile of clothes to be ironed. The workroom remained a sore spot rather than a sanctum. But I could not help smiling after one of these duels, for I would always find, at the bottom layer of Janine's effects, the penciled drawing of a flower labeled "*From J. to R.*" Once, after a particularly stormy session, I discovered a picture of a semihuman figure leading an enormous cat shaped more like a dachshund, titled, "Rainette, the man with the long puss."

The kitchen, usually a neutral zone, could easily become a battle site. Our present living room had been the original location of the kitchen. We moved the stove and sink into the adjoining laundry shed, set up a table, and had most of our meals there. The shed was small, narrow and, as a kitchen, put everything within convenient reach. Even so, Janine was constantly getting up for something she had forgotten to put on the table. Our meals took the form of separate courses; we would finish the meat and a salad before Janine remembered the vegetables burning on the stove. Her defense, in its basic outline, was unassailable:

"In France," Janine stated, "we do not put everything on one plate, all mixed up to gobble like some species of ani-

mal. We eat one thing at a time; it is more enjoyable and better for the digestion."

I agreed in principle. I ceased being surprised and vexed when, swallowing the last spoonful of dessert, Janine suddenly recalled the baked potatoes in the oven.

One thing I insisted on and never got: salt. For some reason, Janine could not bring herself to put the salt shaker on the table. If I asked for it, she would sigh, leave the table and rummage behind the pots and pans. If I rose to find it myself, she became affronted. If I tried valiantly to eat my foot unsalted, Janine would notice my expression—by the time the meal was half over—spring to her feet, seize the shaker as if it contained crystallized uranium, and set it sharply in front of me.

"All you needed to do," Janine said, "was ask *gentiment*. You do not have to say such nasty things."

I protested that I had not spoken a word.

"*Alors*, you admit it," she said triumphantly. "You have been spikking to yourself. And I know exactly what you were saying, and it is very mean of you to think such things in silence."

I had always believed the French, unlike the British, shunned fresh air. With Janine, however, French distrust of ventilation was entirely absent. As the weather turned cooler, she continued to leave the front door ajar all night. Worse, she insisted on keeping the bedroom windows wide open. Thus the bedroom became another contested area. Shivering under the covers, I pleaded with Janine to close the windows—one of them, anyhow, even halfway.

In the tone of an athletics instructor dedicated to turning puny anemia cases into men of iron, she delivered a speech:

"The fresh air is good for you. All of your houses are too hot. It is enough to make one to suffocate. That is why all you Americans have heart maladies—because your circula-

tion is not vigorous. And these little windows do not let in enough air. You should be glad I look after your health, Rainette, because your circulation is unspikkable."

I gritted my teeth and pulled the blankets over my head. But this was only the first wave of Janine's assault. My circulation might have been downright torpid, but she had no basis for criticism. The two blocks of ice at the other end of the bed were her feet, not mine. As soon as I closed my eyes and began to dream of howling blizzards, I was awakened by a frigid toe against my calf. Then a chilly instep would nestle against my leg. If I pulled away from this encroaching glacier, Janine's voice would rise in pitiful lament:

"Now, you see how you are? You will not even let me warm my feet! That is nothing but selfishness, Rainette, because I am not asking you to make any effort but to stay in one place. And you act as if my feet were a meter long."

Although Janine wore a size-five shoe I was in no mood to appreciate frosted feet, however dainty they might be. But it was an engagement I could not win. As soon as I settled myself, she began again. Forced to the brink of the bed, I could only cling to the edge of the mattress and try to sleep while her feet thawed slowly against the small of my back.

In addition to the geography of marital conflicts, I learned that Janine's moods were equally variable. Her expression could be triumphant, glum, martyred, or meditative, in sequence or simultaneously. She chose a suitable attitude with the same care and attention a fencer might use in selecting a blade, or a ballplayer hefting a number of bats. For general purposes, however, Janine's bureau of propaganda and psychological warfare used two basic approaches: cold and hot.

In the cold variation, Janine was relatively silent, her

dark eyes distant and cloudy. She carried a rolled-up handkerchief in one hand. If I asked her what was wrong, she would only shrug absent-mindedly, or purse her lips and sigh "Oh" or "Ah . . ." then stare out of a window. If I let it go at that, she would soon be back again, the handkerchief more in evidence.

In this approach, one of her favorite spots was my workroom. Sitting at my table, I would hear Janine enter and turn to see a forlorn countenance peering over my shoulder. If I started to get up, she would wave her hand.

"*Non, non,* I am not going to bother you, Rainette. You do not need to make any attention for me."

Taking her at her word, I tried to work again. But the silent presence unnerved me. I made idle comments about the weather. She did not answer. After a few minutes more, she sniffed indignantly.

"*Eh bien, évidemment* you are not going to ask me what is wrong."

Despite the fact that I had probably asked before, I repeated my question.

"Ah, that is exactly you, Rainette! Why do you ask when you know perfectly well!"

In the hot variation, Janine became a different person; her eyes flashed, she slammed doors, opened or closed the Venetian blinds with a snap, moved chairs from one place to another—and moved them back again. These operations were accompanied by a murmured obbligato of incomplete sentences, usually in French.

According to philologists, the French vocabulary is not quite as extensive as our own. But the philologists have not taken into account the number of possible inflections and shades of meaning conveyed in a single word. Above all, the philologists have not reckoned with Janine.

Janine had all the resources of the French language at

the tip of her tongue, plus a good percentage of English treasures. She used them as she saw fit, but a few favorites did most of the work. "*Brute!*" although spelled the same in English, has a much greater potential; the French *r* and *u* are capable of elaborate embroidery. Janine could not only range the decibel scale with this word, but "*Brute!*" might come out as a shocked whisper, a tearful trill, or the impartial, matter-of-fact statement of a zoologist in labeling a specimen.

"*Tu m'agaces!*" was another draft horse. According to the dictionary, the verb can signify "to irritate" or "to entice." As Janine used it, there could be no mistake. Often she would put the phrase into third person singular: "*Ah, qu'il m'agace!*" "Ah, how *he* annoys me!" as if my presence were not even worthy of notice.

"*Mufle!*" If Janine had been speaking English, that would have been her pronunciation of "muffler." In French, the word meant something equivalent to "cad" with connotations of the idiotic.

On the English side, Janine usually stuck to a few terms that she could say quickly without paying much attention to grammar or pronunciation which might slow her down and ruin the effect.

"*Uncivilized!*" appeared most frequently. For variety, she might dredge up "*Gangster!*" Unfortunately, Janine's accent turned it into "Gahng-stare," and the sound of it made me laugh so heartily that eventually she stopped using it.

One term she developed on the spur of the moment, and snatched it out of the air with the joy of a merry-go-round rider catching the brass ring. She kept it as a permanent item:

"Rainette, you are a . . . a . . . keednappaire!"

The storms blew over as quickly as they appeared, and I always congratulated myself on keeping my temper reason-

ably well. Most of the time, I knew in advance that my cause was lost; and I had usually forgotten whether the salt shaker, towel, window, or exactly what could have started things. After a few token gestures of defense, I resigned in favor of the expert.

"Now you see what I mean Rainette? It is nothing but your selfishness that makes these *ennuis*. It is *égoisme*, and you should have shame for yourself. You are sitting there without saying a word, all because you do not want to give me the pleasure of arguing with you!"

# CHAPTER 17

If the motives for our domestic thunderstorms were sometimes hard to grasp, Janine's superstitions puzzled me even more. I was not superstitious; admittedly, I threw salt over my shoulder whenever I happened to spill any; under no circumstances would I open an umbrella in the house, walk under a ladder, or put on my left shoe before my right. But I considered these only normal, everyday precautions—while Janine's habits along these lines impressed me as being completely unnecessary, irrational, and unexpected from a people as enlightened as the French.

Janine believed in rusty nails. The older and rustier the nail, the more good luck it carried. She picked them up wherever she happened to see them; her eyes were sharp enough to spot a nail in the most unlikely places—on the window ledges of other people's houses, in the delivery chutes of chewing-gum machines. Once she found a nail in a bottle of milk, which pleased her so much that she made me tear up the note of protest I intended to give the milk man. Even in the midst of traffic, a rusty nail in the street

attracted her like a magnet—although by the time she picked it up and brought it back, dodging automobiles, ignoring the screech of brakes and angry shouts of the drivers, I was sure that whatever luck the nail possessed had been used up immediately. A stroll in town with Janine was something like a scavenger hunt with window shopping an added obstacle. On a good day she would come home with three or four nails in her handbag; these she transferred to a small wicker basket already overloaded and beginning to split its sides.

"See, Rainette," she said when we first started clearing weeds from the back garden, "I knew I had reason when I wanted this house." She held up a handful of nails. "With these, we cannot fail to have the good luck."

On this basis, there was enough good luck for several generations. My lawn mower ran over so much of it that I had to replace the blade. Fortunately nails were the only talismans Janine actually collected, and I was grateful that she had no mystic beliefs about empty bottles or old tin cans.

However, our new neighborhood was full of other favorable omens. The one patch of garden not entirely overrun by crab grass sprouted lilies of the valley. "*Tiens,*" Janine cried, "*les muguets des bois!* Always on the first of May I will give you a bouquet of them, so you will have good luck for the rest of the year. But," she added, "I hope I do not have to do it very often here. Perhaps the next first of May you will have your *muguets* in Paris."

Janine also found the presence of ladybugs encouraging. She would hold her hand under the leaf or twig until the insect climbed to her finger. "This is a good sign," she said as the ladybug finally flew away, "and we must always take care not to hurt these little beasts."

More significant than ladybugs were spiders. We had

them in all sizes, from stubby gray ones that scurried across a wall to leggy specimens that spun huge webs between the evergreens and the doorpost. "A spider in the evening means hope," Janine explained, "and you should never kill him. But if you find a spider in the morning, that is a different history. A morning spider apports *chagrin*." She avoided disturbing any spider that appeared after sundown—and the spiders she discovered in daylight were equally fortunate. According to Janine's rule, she was entitled to smack them with the fly swatter; but at the last moment they were always given a reprieve.

"*Après tout*," she said, "They are morning spiders now, but they were evening spiders only a few hours ago and perhaps they are still lucky."

While good fortune was represented in the insect world by the spiders, the animal kingdom, especially the junkman's horse, offered similar benefits. Once a week, a few hours ahead of the municipal trash collectors, an enterprising junkman arrived to pick through the rubbish barrels. Junkmen were prohibited in my parents' neighborhood, but the paint-blistered wagon with its creaking wheels and fringed awning looked perfectly at home in ours.

"A pie horse!" Janine exclaimed the first time she saw the rig.

I thought for a moment she was confusing the junkman with a baker.

"How can you be so ridiculous?" she said. "It is not a *tarte* horse but *un cheval pie*. What else could it be?"

Then I understood that Janine meant color, not occupation: the junkman's horse was piebald.

"Very good luck," Janine advised me, and stamped her foot several times. The junkman, who had been examining our barrel like a connoisseur, looked at her in bewilderment. "You should always stomp when you see a pie horse," Janine

went on. "There . . . and there . . . and that will be enough to last for a week."

Omens were not always favorable. Whenever her ears rang, Janine would stop what she was doing—whether we were in the middle of dinner or walking down the street—and raise a finger.

"Be silent," she warned. "Someone is saying *méchant* things about me. Tell me a number!"

I chose a number at random, and Janine counted out its equivalent in the alphabet.

"Five . . . a, b, c, d, e . . . *Tiens*, it is someone whose name commences with *e* . . . Emile!"

"But we don't know anybody named Emile," I said.

"*Eh bien* . . . Edouard, Elizabeth . . ."

"We still don't know anybody . . ."

"It has no difference. Whoever is doing it, let him bite his tongue. *Comme ça!*" Janine said, putting the tip of her own tongue between her teeth.

Once I made the mistake of giving her the number eighteen. She counted it quickly. "Eighteen is . . . *r! Tiens*, it is *you*, Rainette, talking about me! There!" Janine gave her tongue a nip. "That will be a good lesson for you."

By virtue of being printed in the newspaper, the daily horoscope carried a good measure of authority. After Janine finished the classified ads, the funnies and the headlines, she turned to the astrological column.

"Since I am a Virgin," Janine said, "and there is no reason for you to make the nasty laugh, I have a good sense of humor, great powers of discrimination, a penetrating glance . . . yes, that is correct," she added, popping out her eyes at me, "and natural efficiency. My occupation should be in medicine . . . again correct . . . architecture . . . even better . . . office management, or bee-keeping."

My birth sign was Aquarius, Janine advised, which meant

that I was inclined to dream, was farsighted but impractical, and had something of a spendthrift nature. "Yes, Rainette, that is you *parfaitement*. You should be an electrician, engineer, or nerve specialist. Why have you never attempted to do any of those things?"

Janine went on to the day's predictions. "You should be cheerful, alert to new opportunities, and careful of your blood pressure. An unexpected event will influence your plans.

"As for me, I am to let my good judgment be my guide. Do not waste time. An auspicious moment to embark on a new business venture. *Tiens*, is that not bizarre! Because I had in mind an idea—a little restaurant, where I could do the French cooking. Of course we could not rent anything now, but the living room would be big enough. I would prepare the meals, and you could be the *garçon* . . . only for a little while, of course . . . What is wrong, Rainette? You have the air *malade*."

Janine laughed. "Surely, Rainette, you do not think I believe in these horoscopes."

"You may not," I said, "but sometimes you make me believe in them."

"How silly," she said. "If I wanted to do anything like that, I would not wait for the horoscope to tell me. Of course if it did," she added, "that would only be so much better."

For several days I approached the house cautiously on my way home from work—half expecting to find tables and bentwood chairs in my workroom. I was grateful that Janine's idea never materialized, although I had stopped being surprised at any of her projects.

I thought I had stopped being surprised. As far as I could see, Janine had tried almost everything; what she hadn't

tried was obviously not worth trying—and I was sure she had considered it. I was ready to defend myself against any new fads, hobbies, or business schemes. But I never foresaw a treacherous flank attack by a magazine subscription.

"I suppose," I said, "the salesman told you he was working his way through college?"

"Attending the university?" Janine said. "Ah, *non*, I am not so foolish to believe a history like that. He was *très gentil, très intelligent*. At first he did not realize I was the lady of the house, because when I came to the door he asked to talk with my mother—he did not believe that I was my mother . . . I mean, that I was the lady he wanted to see.

"Then he asked if he could pose me some questions, such as what was I having for dinner. When I told him, he made a strange, sad face and said it sounded fine, but it was a shame such a nice family was in danger of lacking vitamins by eating old-fashioned meals.

"Then he asked if he could enter the living room, and when he did, he looked around and made the same face, because evidently I was a marvelous natural interior decorator, and it was too bad I was being held back only by lack of knowledge.

"And finally, Rainette, he became very serious and wanted to ask a most personal question: Was my husband difficult to get along with? So of course I had to tell the truth, even if he was a stranger, so I said yes. Then he was truly upset. How many marriages suffer, he said, all because women do not take advantage of the new ideas? It was difficult, he said, because very few magazines publish these facts.

"How lucky I was that he called, Rainette, because the very magazine he was selling was the one I needed; it was exactly suitable for someone who has just arrived in America, particularly from France.

"It would have been a crime not to buy it—besides, I have nothing of my very own to read. So it is all right that I spent some of our Paris money?"

I told Janine that we could easily afford a year's magazine subscription if she wanted it.

"*Bien,* but you see Rainette . . . it is actually for five years. That cost only a little more than one year, so it was worth it. And they can send it to us even after we move."

The name should have warned me instantly: *Home Glamour.* Devoted to career girls who were dying to get married, and housewives who wished they had never given up their jobs, *Home Glamour* was fairly small for its type, only about five hundred pages thick, but filled with colorful advertisements for brassières, girdles, charcoal grilles, toothpaste, cake mixes, and collapsible garages.

As a bonus for subscribing to *Home Glamour,* Janine received four other magazines on the same general subject. At the rate they piled up, they must have been published once a week. Janine stored the back issues in my workroom and kept the current numbers on her night table. She read *Home Glamour* or one of the others before she went to sleep, balancing the big shiny pages on her knees and studying each magnificent illustration.

"*Quand même,*" she sighed, "you Americans are truly modern. Here are lamps that grow from poles, and tables on thin legs like spiders. I do not know if I like them, but they are beyond question modern.

"And here is a Monsieur and Madame Lubhead who have constructed something called a brizzway for their house; and this is evidently Monsieur Lubhead wearing a tall white hat in front of a little fireplace he made. And *voilà* Madame Lubhead with a wagon rolling out some drinks for Monsieur Lubhead. Ah, *dommage* I did not know this magazine when we repaired the house. Then I, too, could have

made the brizzway like other Americans. No matter, we will not be staying that long. But it is not too late for you to get a white hat . . ."

I murmured a prayer of thankfulness when Janine turned the page. But I did not escape so easily from *Home Glamour's* recipes. For a week or more, Janine gave up *bifteck et frites, petits pois à la française,* and the other French dishes she made so well to concentrate on strange mixtures of chopped meat, raw vegetables, fruits, and nuts—generally served altogether in a blue aspic. Unfortunately Janine's aspic never solidified, and most of the time we drank our dinner from bowls.

"But this is not supposed to happen," Janine sobbed. "*Regarde* here." She pointed to the shimmering gelatine molds of *Home Glamour's* "Little Supper of the Month."

"It is not fair," she went on, "because we do not have the brizzway and the funny lamps that we cannot have the modern living. And sometimes I do not think you care."

I did not mind when *Home Glamour* launched a "Capture the Real You in Ten Days" campaign, as long as Janine confined herself to yoga exercises and egg shampoos. But "How to Keep Your Marriage Off the Rocks" came without warning.

As I came home from work one evening, Janine in her best dress met me at the door. Usually I changed into old clothes as soon as I got into the house. From now on, Janine told me, things were different. According to *Home Glamour,* married couples paid too little attention to personal appearance, and soon lost respect for each other.

Janine and I sat stiffly on opposite chairs in the living room, exuding mutual respect. "Now," she said, "you must say some jokes."

The only jokes I knew were hardly the type to encourage

respect. Janine sighed. "This is very serious, Rainette. How can you expect me to share your humor when you say nothing funny?"

I tried to tell her that sharing my humor was above and beyond any set of rules in *Home Glamour* or even the Napoleonic Code.

After a few moments of silence, Janine said, "In that case, Rainette, let us go to your workroom."

A hunted feeling came over me. "What for?" I asked.

"So that I can help you work. *Voilà* . . . right here in the magazine it says that husband and wife must agree, share, and think alike. I sometimes demand of myself what goes on in your head, so I will now find out. The best way, it says, is to start with the same interest."

"Look," I said. "I have a better idea. Instead of helping me work, I will go into the garden and help you pull the weeds out of the flower beds."

"*Ah, ça alors! Non!*" Janine cried. "You are not to touch the garden. You are a brute in the flower beds. Last time you pulled out everything in big handfuls."

We called it a draw for the evening. I put on my old clothes and retired to the workroom. Janine did her yoga exercises. She did not repeat her mutual-respect experiment, but for the next few days her behavior was indefinably strange. From the way she turned her head when I spoke to her, she seemed hard of hearing; she wore a fixed grin at all times. At first I thought she was catching something.

"Can you not see?" Janine asked heatedly. "I am only be sociable and attentive."

I begged her to stop. If "How to Keep Your Marriage off the Rocks" continued, I predicted our own ship of matrimony would soon be stove in.

"*Exactement* what it says here, Rainette. Three out of

four American marriages terminate in divorce. Of course, we were married in France, so perhaps that will help."

I was not interested in statistics so long as Janine never mentioned *Home Glamour* to me again.

"That only proves it," she said. "Here in this article is a chart where one marks one's personality and answers questions. Do you have the good disposition? Are you polite? Do you control the temper, and all things like that. Then one goes to another chart and finds the key number. I have already filled out my chart, and yours too. For myself, I answered all yes for me; and for you, *naturellement*, all no."

"What about the key number?" I asked.

"Your key number," Janine said mournfully, "tells me that you are not compatible. I was sorry, but that is what it says. However, I am compatible, and as long as one of us is, I suppose it will be all right."

Janine turned the pages of the magazine, then stopped and frowned. "*Tiens*, Rainette, *qu'est-ce que c'est que le* positive thanking?"

"It is nothing," I said. "Nothing at all you need to worry about."

"I am content to hear that," Janine said with relief. "Oh, Rainette, I have tried to be an American while I am here, but these magazines make it so difficult!"

# CHAPTER 18

I could have used some positive thinking when November came. In our neighborhood the colors of autumn slashed the trees, the wind stirred the creek; the crooked chimney pots looked weightless in the blue mist. It was a November I shall never forget, for that month our furnace broke down.

Janine tried to fix it, although I knew it was useless. While the house settled into a chill, we bandaged the broken pipes and attempted to seal up the cracked firewall. But the furnace was dead, and even Janine could not revive it. The plumber came, as serious as a mortician, knocked on the pipes, shouted incomprehensible directions to his assistant, squinted up the flue and gave us a coroner's report. The furnace had died from old age and overwork; he was surprised it had lasted so long. We would have to replace the entire heating system. On top of that, the chimney was in bad repair, and we were lucky the house hadn't burned down.

At the price he quoted, I would have preferred a nice

destructive fire, for then I might have come out even on the insurance. But knowing insurance companies to be stuffy about arson, I told the plumber to go ahead with the new system.

That same day, Bob notified me that he was being transferred; he would have to move out of the apartment around the first of the year.

I was sorry to lose Bob and Elise, for they were ideal tenants. However, we would have plenty of time to find new lodgers. The furnace demanded immediate action. I had just begun to repay the money borrowed for the house, and I could not see taking on any long-term debts.

Janine's financial committee held an emergency meeting. No matter how we figured and refigured our budget, we could not escape from the fact that not only would our back-to-Paris fund be almost zero again, we would also have to economize elsewhere, and there was very little to cut.

Music was my hobby, and that year, when things seemed to be going well, I had decided to take violin lessons. Now, after the furnace, the lessons were an unnecessary luxury that would have to be dropped; even then, the saving hardly amounted to much.

"It is the shame to abandon the fiddle," Janine said, "for you love it so much. How that is possible I do not know, but it is your affair. You can have your lessons, Rainette, and I will simply augment my dressmaking and hair-cutting."

Janine's small profits from these had little weight to begin with, and of the two possibilities I would have preferred to give up the violin forever. What we needed was an extra income. The only thing I could see was for me to find a job at night.

It was a glum prospect, and I put off looking for anything until the end of the week. By then, Janine had a new plan:

"It is I who will get the work," she said. "Madame Lamotta, and Bianca, Madame Gaslevich, and nearly everyone works in the mill. Why should not I? Madame Lamotta knows one of the overlookers, and she told me I may have a job any time I want."

From what I had heard about the textile mill, it was the last place in the world I wanted Janine to be. Felix once had a job there and exchanged it gladly for the calm, untroubled life of a scrap-iron collector.

"When do you start?" I asked.

"Monday," Janine said. "How did you know, Rainette? I was kipping it for the surprise."

Assigned to the early shift, she left the house long before I did. I could hear her calling to Bianca and Mrs. Lamotta as they met at the corner of our street, the footsteps and voices of the rest of the mill crew passing beyond our wall, then silence; and the rooms were empty, the mornings dull.

Janine's shift stopped working at four o'clock, so that she was home ahead of me. If my mornings without her had been drab, my evenings were jolted by a running account of her day. I understood why Felix had taken to scrap iron and wondered if he might consider hiring an assistant.

Janine had begun as an apprentice in the inspecting room, where she stayed on her feet most of the time and unwound cloth from heavy rollers. It seemed a grueling job, and my only consolation, judging from what she told me, was that she might not have it very long.

"The leddies' room," Janine said. "Can you imagine that they count every time one goes? This afternoon the foreman told me I was going too often. So I told him that was my affair, and he grew angry and asked who I thank I am—which was a stupid question. Then he said I had better pay attention to my steps, and I said he should pay attention

to his own steps and not occupy himself with things that do not concern him.

"And all the time Madame Lamotta and Bianca were making the shooshing noises at me, but the foreman was shouting so much I could not hear them anyway. Finally I told him I was French and would go to the leddies' room as much as I wanted.

"Madame Lamotta was sure I was going to be put on fire (is that correct, Rainette?) at the end of the day, because the foreman told The Man with the Hat about it.

"The Man with the Hat is the big boss, and they call him that because he is always wearing one made of straw —*un canotier* like your father has in the summer. He stays in his bureau most of the time, but he also walks around the mill. We know when he is coming because everyone starts whispering, 'The Hat! The Hat!' and pointing to their head.

"*Alors,* the foreman was very deranged, so he went to The Man with the Hat. Outhouse Charlie—I do not know why he is named that way, but he is the carpenter and goes wherever he wants in order to repair things—was listening at the door; he heard The Man with the Hat laugh and say, 'Well, Eddie, maybe the French really do have to go more often'; then he told Eddie not to worry so much and just make sure the cloth was inspected.

"So I was not put on fire after all, and the foreman says I can call him Eddie, which is something nobody does until they work there almost a year.

"Now you see, Rainette, that it pays to be French and we did not make the revolution for nothing."

Another time, Janine was silent at the dinner table. Finally she asked:

"A frog . . . that is *la grenouille, n'est-ce pas?* Then

why do they call me that? I do not resemble a frog, Rainette."

When I told Janine it referred not to her appearance but her nationality, she looked at me darkly.

"Is this a *gentil* thing to say?"

I admitted it was not exactly a compliment.

"It is the fault of Outhouse Charlie, then," Janine said, "because he started it, and now everybody calls me that. *Très bien*, we shall see."

From Janine's look of satisfaction the following day, I imagined she had brought the frog incident to a successful conclusion.

"*Exactement*," Janine said. "I went to Outhouse Charlie as soon as I arrived. I told him, I am proud if I am a frog, but that is no rizzon to call me one; then I threw at him a bag of water which I happened to have in my hand. '*Tiens*, there is a frog for you,' I said; 'next time I will fill it with the colors they use on the cloth.'

"Then Big Louie, who is strong because he is always lifting the rollers, said I was right, and nobody liked to be called those names. If anybody said frog to me again, Big Louis promised he would kick them in the . . . I forget what word he used, but until then I thought it meant some species of animal."

Janine's work at the mill not only gave her a steady salary, it increased her knowledge of English—although this was a dividend I would willingly have foregone. I could never get accustomed to Janine's speaking slang; she had already picked up a certain amount of it from me, until I made a point of not using it around the house. But the mill took over where I left off and added some fine points I had not thought of.

"If something is more good," Janine said, "do you not say 'better?' Then I do not believe Outhouse Charlie and

Louie and the others can speak the English as well as I. Because they are always saying 'bester.' Yet it has no sense, for usually they say it when things are not good at all.

"*Par exemple,* Eddie was giving the hell to Louie, and when Louie walked away he kept shaking his head and saying, 'bester . . . bester.' "

I gave Janine a brief definition of the word.

"So that is what it means," Janine nodded. "In France, we call people camels or cows, and that is very insulting. But here, to call someone a camel is nothing; instead, you have this other word which has no significance in France. *C'est curieux.* I wonder if the other words are like that—the ones Eddie taught me to say."

Janine, her face full of innocence, pronounced a long directive which any mule skinner would have envied. "Is that the English swearing?" she asked. "It does not sound to me half as bad as we say in France, *'sacré nom d'un chien!'* "

The sacred name of a dog might relieve a Frenchman's emotions; but when I defined the ancient four-letter words Janine had just used, she admitted that even the French had a lot to learn.

"No wonder Madam Lamotta was laughing and holding her hand over her mouth; and poor Bianca's face was so red. And Eddie telling me how good my pronunciation was. I am glad I found what those things mean, so I will be sure not to say them." Janine tossed her head angrily.

"Those besters," she added.

Outhouse Charlie, Janine told me, was the Don Juan of the mill. Several times a day he slicked his hair with pomade and squirted himself with an atomizer he kept in his locker. Unfortunately, lint from the processing rooms settled on his head and stayed there; and the aroma of lanolin, dye, and machine oil ruined whatever scent he used. But

Outhouse Charlie thought of himself as a lady-killer and passed much of his time leering at the girls in the inspecting room.

"Before," Janine said, "he was always sending notes to Big Fat Bertha. Now he is trying to make the rendezvous with me. He stands at the gate where he knows I come out and follows me all the way up the street."

"If he keeps on," I said furiously, "you can tell him for me that I'll walk right into that mill and punch him in the nose."

"I already did," Janine said.

"Good," I said. "And I hope you told him in no uncertain terms."

"I will tell him tomorrow."

"But I thought you had. Didn't you just say . . ."

"I do not mean I told him," Janine said. "I mean I punched him."

I was convinced by this time that Janine could take care of herself at the mill or anywhere else. But I was not at all convinced that her working made any improvement in our finances. Checking over our budget at the end of the month, I found we had made progress—in the wrong direction. We were about thirty dollars in the red.

"*Voyons*," Janine calculated, "there were the clothes to buy for work. And of course, the lunches. At home I did not eat any lunch—but now I get hungry and must bring food with me, and it counts up. These shoes they do not last too long because now I am always walking around. Then I must pay dues to *le syndicat*. And every week there is the big lottery—if they draw the same number as your check-pay, you win two hundred dollars. *Naturellement*, you must first put in your two dollars, but it is worth it. Also, we have the hospital collections and the birthday collections."

In addition to Janine's items, I discovered I had forgotten to allow for extra income tax. On top of everything else, I owed money to the government.

"A strange country," Janine said, "where working can be so expensive. A poor man could not afford it."

# CHAPTER 19

Shortly after New Year's, we said good-by to Bob and Elise. My advertisement had attracted no new tenants, and our second floor was empty again. We had just about decided people didn't look for apartments in the winter when a Mr. Munter telephoned. He arrived—a heavy, stocky man of middle age with a large head and a toothy grin—walked briskly around the apartment, examined everything with sharp efficiency, nodded once and took out a bulging wallet.

"There's a month in advance. I'll get the movers right on the job," Mr. Munter said. "Be in tomorrow. Staying alone for a while. Mrs. Munter in Florida now. Alice. A sweet girl. Winter vacation. Too busy to take one myself."

"*Un drôle de type,*" Janine said after Mr. Munter had put on his hat, buttoned up a close-fitting overcoat, and pounded his heels down the steps.

"And his wife," she went on. "If she is in Florida, why did he not wait until she returns? A man does not select the apartment without showing it to his wife. But he rented it

immediately. I ask you, why is that, Rainette? I tell you. Because there is no wife!"

Janine, I said, was letting her imagination run away with her. I laughed at her worried expression. She had been listening to Samantha Pair-keens, I told her. Then I stopped. There *was* something strange about it. Perhaps Munter was a bigamist, or dodging alimony. Yet I was sure he had said his wife would join him.

"*Alors,*" Janine said, "a woman comes along later. Are you sure she is his wife? That she is not *la petite amie?* Waiting until the coat is queer?"

That, naturally, would be the French reaction. But Janine was beginning to stir up my own doubts. Perhaps there was no such person as Mrs. Munter. Or perhaps . . . We looked at each other. "Do you think," I asked, "he could have murdered her?"

Janine shrugged. "With the American gong-stares, all is possible."

The movers brought Mr. Munter's furniture next day. It was fairly good quality, a little heavy and overstuffed, a conservative type I would have expected him to prefer. He had a great many kitchen gadgets, a phonograph, a tall blue vase, a television, about a dozen fishing rods, and three of what might be shotguns in canvas cases.

We saw little of Mr. Munter himself for the next few days. Then, late one night when Janine and I were half asleep, we heard a series of pops followed by a metallic ringing.

Janine sat up. "Rainette! He is destroying the apartment! Go immediately and make him stop."

The recollection of Mr. Munter's shotguns pulled me out of bed. I put on my trousers and bathrobe, hurried upstairs, and rapped on the apartment door.

Our tenant, in shirt sleeves, grinned at me. "Didn't mean

to disturb you folks. Thought I fixed everything to cut out the noise. Come on in."

I followed him to the living room. "For a minute," I laughed, "I imagined you were having some target practice."

"I was," Mr. Munter said. He pointed to an air pistol on a side table. At the far end of the room, surrounded by blankets and pieces of cardboard, stood a miniature target with metal disks that flipped down when hit. "It's perfectly safe," he went on. "Designed for use indoors. Little toy hardly makes a sound. Here, have a shot."

I took the pistol uneasily. "I didn't really intend . . ." I fired and missed the target. The pellet lodged in the blankets. "No damage," Mr. Munter said. "Wouldn't hurt a fly." I had to admit the pistol gave out nothing more than a slight pop. I fired again and hit a bull's-eye. We both laughed. It was harmless enough and actually a lot of fun.

"Have another shot," Mr. Munter said. "A different kind." Waving my objections aside, he brought a bottle. "Best Scotch," he said. "Can't buy it here. Special order." He poured half a glassful for each of us.

I began to feel warm and pleasant. Mr. Munter's target-shooting seemed an unusual way to spend an evening, but suddenly I could think of no reason to object.

"Don't have much else to do," Mr. Munter said. "Alice away. Just work hard, keep busy. Take cold showers."

He poured another drink and put on some records of Hawaiian music. "Take you all out fishing later on," Mr. Munter said. "Friend of mine docks a trim little craft down at the shore. I can use her any time I want. Have a wonderful time. Lots of good fun."

We fired a few more volleys. Mr. Munter was convinced I had won medals for sharpshooting, although it seemed to me I constantly missed the target.

"Picked it up in the army, eh?" Mr. Munter said. "Always tell a combat veteran. Keen eye. Tough."

I made vague motions, denying that Mr. Munter's picture did not exactly correspond with my army career.

"I understand," he said. "Don't want to talk about it. Lot of danger. Better to forget.

"Sorry I bothered you folks," Mr. Munter went on as I made my way to the door. "Don't worry. Take everything down in the morning."

Janine was waiting for me. "Rainette, you have been dranking. And after you went up there was more noise than ever."

From the ceiling came a muffled ping. I told Janine about the air pistol and I tried to explain that Mr. Munter was a fine fellow who wanted to take us fishing on a private yacht . . .

"I do not know what you say, Rainette. When you are in that state, you believe everything. You are not severe enough to be a lord-land; it is not the same with me. Now I am all awake, thanks to you, but we shall see about it."

I was too feeble to protest when Janine dressed quickly and went upstairs. I only hoped she would not be too angry and make him change his mind about the fishing trip. Janine was back in our room when I opened my eyes again.

"It is, after all, only a game," Janine said, "and does not have the air dangerous. And he was already stopping. But you should see the machines in the kitchen—and beater-eggs and all the electric things. When he saw me looking at them he said he would get a mixing machine for me at the . . . what you call wholesale? And he can obtain anything like that for us at the bargain.

"He showed me his wife's photo. She is ill, *pauvre dame;* she does not dare to make the exertion. It is he who arranges the cooking and the dishes. The cleaning he per-

forms after his work. Before his wife arrives, he intends to stay all night waxing and polishing. So, whether it is his wife or his *petite amie*, I am sure they will keep the apartment nicely. And that, Rainette, should be the good example for you."

A few days later, Mr. Munter indeed brought us a mixer. However, he claimed there had been some confusion at the warehouse and he could not get the wholesale rate. To me the price seemed even higher than retail; but Janine was so thrilled with the gadget I did not have the heart to give it back. By juggling my overdue bills and delaying our grocery buying, we managed to survive until payday.

By the time we recovered, Mr. Munter had another proposal. It concerned insulating the roof. The upstairs apartment was chilly—not that he minded for himself. "It's Alice," Mr. Munter said, "she's a delicate thing. Wouldn't want you folks to feel responsible for . . . whatever happened." Since he was getting the apartment ready for her arrival, he offered to do the insulating himself as long as we paid for the material. If we could lend him a hand, he could finish the job in a few hours.

Janine and I talked it over privately. The apartment was undeniably chilly, more so than our ground floor. The insulation would not put us too far in the red, and in the long run we would save on heat. Although it was an unexpected burden, we decided to go ahead.

This time I bought the insulation myself. As Mr. Munter helped drag the sack upstairs, he asked how much I had paid. He shrugged. "A little high. For the same money, I could have picked up a better grade. This stuff has ground glass mixed in. But it'll do."

Janine and I climbed into the half-story under the roof. Mr. Munter worked along with us for a while, then suddenly remembered a business apointment. "Have to wash and

shave, get into some clean clothes. Listen, folks, this was my idea, not yours. Just leave everything where it is. Do it myself when I get back."

Mr. Munter disappeared down the ladder. Janine, vexed, was all for taking him at his word. But we were already grimy, the insulation was practically in place, and it seemed easier to keep on until we finished.

"That bester," Janine said, as we tried to shake the ground glass out of our clothes. My back looked hive-ridden, and after three shower baths I still itched.

Munter rapped on our door one night to tell us a pipe in the bathroom was leaking. Nothing serious. He could put a pan under it. But if nobody would be home to empty it during the day, the water might overflow and leak through our ceiling. He mentioned it only for our own good.

I put in an emergency call to the plumber. Munter walked briskly upstairs again.

The shower was the next thing. Munter told us how lucky we were. "Good thing I noticed it when I did," he said. "All filled in with rust. If I hadn't taken it apart, the pressure would have backed up all along the line. Eventually, your water jacket would have exploded."

I do not remember the exact sequence, but within the next two weeks Munter called our attention to everything in the apartment remotely connected with water. There was a hazardous elbow joint under the kitchen sink, a certain radiator valve that threatened to scald him; what couldn't leak blocked up; whatever wasn't blocked was broken. Since we could not afford to hire the plumber on a retainer's fee, we bought parts and tried to do the work ourselves. Plumbing was not one of Janine's specialties and I knew even less about it. Usually we broke the parts and had to call in the plumber anyhow.

In the course of pointing out our hazards, Munter began

spending more and more time downstairs. At first, when I invited him to sit down and talk for a while, he pleaded business engagements—and sat down anyway. Then he sat down whether I invited him or not.

I came to dread his knock on the door. Once, when I excused myself to finish up something in the workroom, I returned to find Munter sitting on my favorite chair, reading my newspaper.

"Perhaps he is lonely," Janine said, after Munter finally put down the newspaper and retired upstairs. "Perhaps he is filled with remorse for the assassination of his wife."

I admitted that taking over a man's chair and newspaper was despicable, but I doubted that even Munter would be a type to resort to violence.

Janine shrugged. "*Eh bien,*" she sighed, "but if his wife does not soon appear, perhaps we will be very lucky and *la police* will come and take him away."

# CHAPTER 20

Janine's hopes were unfounded; the arrival of Mrs. Munter eliminated any doubts we had about her existence. She was approximately the same size and weight as her husband, with a mass of frizzled hair and a stony jaw. She called Janine "dearie" and showed her desire to be neighborly by borrowing our last bottle of milk.

In the days that followed, Mrs. Munter gave us even greater examples of her good will. If friendship can be based on a willingness to share, Mrs. Munter was ready to cooperate. She was delighted to share—and she shared nearly everything we had.

Her shortages ran in cycles: coffee one day, bread the next, followed by sugar, tea, potatoes, canned vegetables, and back to coffee again—indicating, I supposed, the points at which she ran out of what we had loaned her in the first place.

Despite her calorie intake, Mrs. Munter found the apartment cold. The house seemed comfortable enough to me, but I remembered Munter saying his wife was delicate. She

obviously concealed her fragility from others as a matter of pride. I would have been glad to let her roast somewhere else, but was not hardhearted enough to see her freeze. The thermostat in our living room controlled both floors, so I moved it up to eighty degrees. Mrs. Munter continued to shiver. Munter bought an electric heater that skyrocketed my electric bill, regularly blew out fuses, and plunged us into darkness when we least expected it. Munter, investigating the wiring system, announced cheerfully that he had found a few minor deficiencies.

He was sympathetic, he knew the difficulties and expense of keeping an old house together. With luck, we might postpone having new wires installed.

"It's a calculated risk," he said. "Can't really tell what might happen. Go along for years. Or . . . by the way, do you folks have any kind of fire escape?"

I called the electrician in the morning.

The job should have taken less than a day, but the electrician ran into trouble. Pascuccio had evidently made some repairs himself, then covered everything with concrete. By nightfall the electricians were still at work, and the upstairs apartment had no lights.

Mrs. Munter came down to borrow candles. She stayed to smoke a few of my cigarettes and look through *Home Glamour*. In a little while, Munter appeared. He took his usual place in my chair, read my newspaper, and puffed contentedly on a cigar.

"In the summer," Munter said, "we'll all get to work. Take down a couple of those mulberry trees. Put up a little cabaña. Maybe a lawn swing. Alice would like that. Fix things nice for you folks. Make this house a show place. Used to be in the home-improvement line and I can get all that stuff at cost."

Janine and I took refuge in my workroom. When the up-

stairs lights went on, Mr. Munter stubbed out his cigar and wished us good night.

We saw a great deal more of the Munters—always in our own living room. Munter had warmed up to his projects and showed a fertile imagination for others:

"What you folks really need is an incinerator," Munter said. "Put it right in the back. Set up some forms, pour some concrete for a base, no trouble at all. Save a lot of grass cutting for you. Where I had in mind . . . that section of the vegetable garden. You don't save anything on vegetables. Soon as the weather gets warm, we'll look the place over."

Another time he suggested a small swimming pool. Nothing fancy; just deep enough for wading, since Munter and his wife did not know how to swim.

"I got lots of good ideas," he said. "Actually, you people are the ones to get the benefit. But I guess you'll let us enjoy them too. After all, we're neighbors. World would be a lot better off with more neighbors in it."

Munter's philosophy evidently did not apply to himself and his wife. Since Mrs. Munter had come to brighten the apartment, Munter had given up target practice; we no longer heard the sound of the air pistol. Instead, the voices of the Munters in family disagreement rose above the exotic strains of Hawaiian guitars.

"I do not mind the fighting so much," Janine said, "although it becomes monotonous. But we have had nothing but bad luck since he came. Not only does his wife take our food, but he talks of cutting down our trees! Soon he will take our whole house! No, that I will not support. He is not a *locataire* but a monster!

"And, Rainette," Janine added, "it is all your fault."

I looked up in surprise. "Yes," she went on, "it all started with the shooting. You should have put the foot down right

away. You were not severe enough, with all this affair of yachts and *je ne sais quoi* and you have let him do anything he wants . . ."

I reminded Janine about the mixer she had been so anxious to get. She reminded me about the time I left her waiting at a bus stop—this was in Paris several years before and had nothing to do with Munter, but it was enough to start a chain reaction. I suddenly realized Janine and I were shouting at each other at the top of our voices. We both stopped.

"*Mon dieu,*" Janine said, "it is not enough for these monsters to take our house—we are beginning to resemble them!"

We agreed that things had gone entirely too far. I had no idea how we could handle the situation tactfully or if we could handle it at all. Janine did.

"When Madame Munter came down to see if I had the extra coffee," Janine told me the next day, "I said we could have no more borrowing, or taking your chair or thinking about cutting my trees. And that was that."

I was glad Janine had made things plain to Mrs. Munter, but I hoped she hadn't offended her.

"Ah, perhaps she was a little vexed," Janine admitted, "but I said it was you who insisted on these things."

Janine's talk with Mrs. Munter had an instant effect. That evening, Munter set up a barricade.

At the front of the house, a vestibule and stairway led to the apartment. Through a doorway in our bedroom, Janine and I could enter this vestibule and go out the front door. The only downstairs exit was at the rear of the house, opening onto a roundabout, inconvenient path through the back garden. Munter had changed the lock on the front door. Our own bedroom door was locked somehow from

the outside. Peering through the crack along the jamb, I saw what I guessed to be a number of hooks and eyes.

"*C'est ridicule!*" Janine cried. "Now we are not free in our own house! I predicted this, Rainette! *Ah, non!* this is not supportable!"

We agreed that Munter must go. Since I would have to give him a month's notice, I was eager to get started.

"Not you, Rainette," Janine said. "I know you too well. Like before, he will start with his fish and yachts, and you will listen. *Non*, it is I who will tell him. You wait here so there is no danger of putting your foot to your mouth."

She left by the back entrance, circled around and rang the front doorbell. Munter came downstairs and let her in. I heard them go to the apartment and I listened with satisfaction to the muffled voices from the ceiling. A few minutes later, Janine came back, white and trembling.

"What have you done!" she cried. "That monster says he does not have to move. He has no intention to move. He will keep all the doors locked and if he feels like it he does not even have to pay the rent."

We had forgotten to sign the lease.

Janine and I held a council of war in the workroom. She recommended a frontal assault. We could knock the pins from our door hinges and gain the vestibule. There we could set up a road block and keep Munter upstairs; or Janine could start a harassing action, throwing rocks at his windows while I stormed his door.

Janine showed good strategic thinking; it was the sort of thing Napoleon or Marshal Foch would have ordered. But in hand-to-hand combat, Munter and his wife would have outweighed us. The only reasonable thing was to see a lawyer.

I made an appointment as soon as possible. But the reasonable approach seemed much less effective than Janine's idea. As the lawyer explained, it was a simple matter to arrange. All we had to do was file various papers at the county seat, make out the necessary forms for one of the federal agencies, with duplicates to everyone concerned. With any kind of luck, we should be granted a hearing before the year was out; of course, in the event of an appeal, or a court action, we might run into some delay. And there were certain expenses, legal fees . . .

I told the lawyer we would let him know.

"If the French had paid attention to lawyers," Janine muttered, "there would be no Bastille Day."

Meanwhile, Munter remained securely in his castle. I was ready to call the lawyer and start filling out forms.

But even the greatest general can make a tactical blunder. Janine realized Munter's error as soon as she heard the front door open and close. She went to the window, "*Tiens*," she said, "they are both going out. Quickly, Rainette, we must not lose our time."

We chipped through old layers of paint before we could reach the door hinges; from then on, it was easy enough to work out the pins. The door swung free. In the vestibule, I saw that Munter had indeed used several rows of hooks and eyes to shut us out. Luckily, I had kept Pascuccio's bolt and burglar-proof chain on the front door. I set them both.

Munter had also changed the upstairs lock. With a sigh, I broke inside a pane of glass in the apartment door, reached through and turned the latch. Janine and I tiptoed through Munter's fortress like spies behind enemy lines. It was very quiet.

"Now what do we do?" I asked.

"Wait, Rainette, and you will see."

We were still upstairs when we heard Munter try his key,

then rattle the door. Janine ran to the window, flung it open, and leaned out. I could imagine a long line of Janine's ancestors making the same gesture over centuries of barricades.

She expressed our point of view simply, colorfully, and many of the terms acquired at the mill figured prominently. If Munter did not send a moving van to clear out his furniture by noon next day, Janine would personally throw it into the street.

Munter began shouting something about police, property rights, and long-term sentences for both of us; Mrs. Munter added a rich contralto.

"If he can stay here because there is no lease," Janine said to me, "then we can do the same thing. I do not know if this is your American law, but it is a good idea. *Tiens*, give me that vase."

I handed it to her. The vase was a big one and made a loud smash on the pavement below.

Munter began shouting again—but in terms of negotiation. They would move out at the end of the week, if not before.

"*Non!*" Janine said. "Go away this moment. *Autrement*, next will come the music of Hawaii."

"Where do you expect us to sleep?" Munter asked querulously.

"Go to Goozik's Hotel!" Janine turned away from the window. "I do not think he comprehended me," she explained. "I heard him say that was no language for a lady."

In the end, Janine relented. She called back Munter and his wife and we told them they could stay until they found another place. I made sure to get his signature on a new lease even before he walked upstairs.

The Munters kept to themselves after that. The pipes and fuses suddenly began to work perfectly, but Munter

was a defeated man. Within two weeks, a moving van arrived. Munter supervised the loading. Mrs. Munter was nowhere in sight.

The rainstorm that night did not dampen our spirits. We went upstairs to look over our recaptured apartment. Janine skipped through the magnificently empty rooms.

I was rapidly forgetting Munter. We had finished with him, with the repairs, with whatever jinx he had brought. And that was one advantage. In the long run, I told Janine, everything had its brighter side. For a moment I did not notice her pointing to the leak which the storm had uncovered and which was gradually spreading over the ceiling.

# CHAPTER 21

In the spring, we had no difficulty renting the apartment. This time I made sure the lease was ironbound, foolproof, with clauses and subclauses, an entanglement of legal barbed wire against possible Munters of the future. As things turned out, we did not need it. The next couple were as pleasant as Bob and Elise. Newlyweds, they had their own interests, and we rarely saw them.

The cold weather passed, our hedges gave up looking like potential kindling; the mulberries put out leaves, and the flowering peach tree on Felix's side of the property reached across to scatter its blossoms on the moist turf. We spent most of our days outside; the house had momentarily stopped clamoring for attention, the newlyweds were unconcerned about rattling windows or water jackets; and we could devote more time to our non-rent-paying lodgers.

We had the ordinary run of local birds—robins, sparrows, catbirds, cardinals, jays. Making up for lack of variety, we had them in quantity. The previous spring, Janine had adopted some cats, and I feared they would drive the

birds away. The birds only came back with reinforcements. During the winter, Janine threw crumbs to a starling colony; the new arrivals raised feeding from a boardinghouse level to a large-scale distribution service.

Janine appointed herself supervisor of birds. She not only collected dry bread and seeds for them, but made certain they all had a proper share. The cardinals, fewer in number, aloof and aristocratic, did not often participate in Janine's feedings. Flickering crimson streaks, they stayed on the high branches of the maple, and whistled disdainfully at the crowd of robins and sparrows below.

Except for a certain amount of shouldering and jostling, the robins and sparrows got along well. Even when Janine put nothing out for them, they foraged together without incident; the sparrows picking over the freshly cut grass, the robins tuning in on earthworms and grubs. The blue jays made up the hoodlum element.

The jays must have had scouts lurking in the mulberry trees to notify the rest of the gang whenever Janine came out with provisions. As soon as her back was turned, they began muscling in. Pushing aside the naïve robins, the jays took over the lawn.

"That is not fair," Janine cried. "Those birds are nothing but *cochons*!" Armed with a fly swatter, she patrolled the picnic grounds, swishing at the defiant jays, who brazenly ruffled their crests and squawked at her.

When she judged the robins and sparrows had their portion, she moved away and let the jays come down. When I laughed at her and told her the jays had no idea of why she swatted at them, Janine disagreed.

"We understand each other," she said, holding the fly swatter in readiness, "and they know exactly what I mean."

If I was half tempted to believe her about the jays, there was no question in my mind when it came to the squirrels.

All winter, Janine had thrown peanuts over the snow crust for the benefit of two gray squirrels living in a crotch of the maple tree. By spring, she had tamed them enough to eat from her hand and she summoned them by her own special chirping noise.

They scuttled down the tree trunk, sat on their haunches, and waited their turn in the peanut line. Janine looked on them as a devoted couple and she was indignant when a sleek, enormously bushy-tailed squirrel from Felix's tree lured one of them away.

The remaining squirrel stayed forlornly in the maple. "He does not look well," Janine said, "and his appetite is bad. He is most unhappy about that gigolo."

I suggested kidnapping a mate from one of the parks. Janine took the idea seriously and was ready to pack a gunny sack and embark on a safari to Rittenhouse Square. Fortunately our squirrel was able to look after his own interests, and one day Janine saw him clucking over a new arrival.

"*Quand même,*" she said with a critical air, "it did not take him very long."

We never saw the moles in person, so Janine never succeeded in establishing diplomatic relations. But when long ridges and turf-covered archways appeared in a section of the garden, she strictly forbade me to interfere with the underground galleries. Had the moles known the terrible fate which Janine averted, I am sure they would have been appreciative.

She did not confine her interest to birds and animals. The morning spiders went about their business unmolested. Crickets, according to Janine, also brought good luck and came under her protection. She was fascinated by the long, drawn-out buzzing of locusts—but preferred not to meet them face to face. When the grasshoppers came along, I showed her the boyhood trick of catching them and holding

them gently between thumb and forefinger, while pronouncing the magic formula: "Spit tobacco and I letcha go!" Janine had trouble remembering the words; the grasshoppers spat tobacco juice anyway—but she never developed a real fondness for the game.

The first mantis she saw sent her running into the house as if it had threatened her life.

"It is terribill! A stick with claws like a lobster—and it waved at me!"

At first I did not know whether she was talking about someone in the neighborhood or an advance party of Martians. I followed her to the garden where the mantis clung to a plant stem. I suppose the French had their share of mantises, but Janine had evidently never run into one.

"That is some species of American beetle," she said, looking at it distrustfully. When I assured her it was harmless and did useful work in the garden, her attitude softened. After a few more minutes of scrutiny, she decided the mantis was a sympathetic chap.

"But you are sure, Rainette, they do not grow any bigger?"

The mantis turned out to be a female, almost ready to lay its eggs. Every so often Janine went to check on its progress. Had she known in the beginning that the mantis was an expectant mother, she would have been more friendly. To make up for the first cool reception, she put down a cardboard box with leaves and a saucer of water. But the mantis disappeared before the tiny ones arrived.

"*Bien*," Janine said, "I did all that was possible. If they come back, I hope they will remember me."

Janine knew all of the neighborhood dogs by name or reputation. Butch, a white Eskimo type, always grinning and wagging his tail, had long been believed to visit the cemetery up the street and sit by the family burying plot.

"I have watched him," Janine said, "and he is a faker. He starts off in that direction, but he goes under the bushes and snoozes." Nevertheless we kept his secret.

The chihuahua from the Gaslevich house was constantly terrorized by the shaggy mixed-breed belonging to one of the Mahoneys. Mrs. Lamotta's thirty-per-cent beagle was a night howler. Teddy, at the O'Reilly house, was not a habitual car chaser, but he took a special dislike to our Model A. He always heard me start the car and lay in wait just beyond the corner. As soon as I made the turn, he would charge, yapping and snarling, racing after the car for about a hundred yards, biting at the flimsy tires, until he decided he had given it a good scare. Alone, I could shout myself hoarse without making him give up the pursuit but, when Janine was with me, all she needed to do was lean out the window and command him to stop. He would trot back to the curb, panting for the day when he would catch the Model A out by itself.

As long as the dogs kept out of her garden, Janine stayed on good terms with them. During our first spring, we had our own dog—a half-grown, gangling imitation of a hound. I had found him at the local animal shelter and named him Barkis. He was easygoing and good-natured, the laziest dog I had ever met, and completely unteachable—even by Janine. I would have taken him back to the pound, but Janine refused to allow it. Since I had bailed him out, led him to believe he would have a good home, it was not fair to cancel his reprieve.

He ran off one day; Janine was not overly distressed when he did not come back. She had no basic objection to dogs as a group, but her specialty was cats. After Barkis, Janine took charge of the pet department and brought in our first cat. By the following spring we had acquired a total of three: Rabbit, a brown tabby; Heathcliff, an alley cat

trying to disguise himself as a blue Persian, and David, jet-black offspring of a Siamese mother and a father who traveled incognito.

I fell in love with the cats, almost in spite of myself. Heathcliff in particular attached himself to me with a violent, undeviating affection. Yet Janine was the one who handled most of the details of feedings, brushing, and first aid. She had a way with cats, an instinct I could never quite match. During the spring and summer, she proved it again—not with any of our own pets but with an enormous tom who belonged to no one.

A piebald cat with ragged ears, a face stitched with scars, he appeared out of nowhere and seemed to be going nowhere. I found him crouching on the workbench in the shack; as soon as he saw me, he sprang out the broken window and vanished into the hedges. I paid no further attention, but in a little while he came back again and squatted a few yards from the porch.

He was the biggest cat I had ever seen; the muscles under his sparse fur looked like steel springs; he had a barrel chest and legs almost as thick as my wrists. His eyes were a startling green—what you could see of them, for they were framed in heavy scar tissue. He had the swagger of an old pirate, and I named him Billy Bones.

Not that I used the name for calling purposes—he never came indoors. Janine, who would not resist adopting an elephant if she could make it fit into the house, wanted to add him to the clan. I had no objection to taking in a stray; Heathcliff himself had been a homeless cat. Our own cats had yowled and hissed at the newcomer for a while, but had since calmed down and appeared ready to welcome him. The only dissenter was Bones himself.

Unlike the usual stray, he was not anxious to come inside. Janine lured him to the porch once, but he sniffed nerv-

ously, arched his back, and skittered outside again. As I watched him, I understood why. There are cats who, through one circumstance or another, have grown up away from human beings. They are the wild loners of the cat world, living by their wits and stamina, miniature jaguars prowling through woods and fields. I did not believe Bones to be actually feral; I doubted that a feral animal would even come near a human. But he was the closest thing to the type I had ever seen. If he were looking for a handout, his sales approach needed revision.

The first time Janine bent down to pat him, he spat, bristled, and slashed at her face. She pulled away too late; her cheek bled from a nasty scratch that stopped about half an inch from her eye.

Usually we were the ones who applied first aid to cats; this time, I had to keep Janine quiet while I patched up the claw marks. She began to cry—not so much from her wounded cheek as from her wounded feelings. No cat had ever done anything like that to her, and for a few moments she was at a loss. I thought we should chase Bones away or give him to a deserving friend. Janine had other ideas.

"I have med up my mine about that cat," she said.

A strange battle began. Her first assault on Bones was to feed him. While our other cats ate in the kitchen, Janine carried a plate outside to Bones. He gobbled up the food willingly enough—as long as she stayed about ten feet away. She accepted this limitation, but as the days passed and Bones began showing up regularly for his meals, she gradually moved closer. She did not touch him. Bones, bolting his food, stopping a second to glance distrustfully at Janine, cleaned up his plate, and retired to the far end of the garden to clean his whiskers.

In time he stopped running off as soon as he ate and did his washing in front of the shack. He had quit growling

when Janine came near him. From the way he raised his head and pointed his jagged ears, he even seemed to look forward to it.

"He would like to be *gentil*," Janine said, "but he does not know how."

I doubted that Bones would ever learn. But Janine kept on. Soon he came swaggering up when she called. Not always, of course, for no one could expect that from any cat, let alone from such an independent seafaring type as Bones. He came only when he felt like it; but he felt like it oftener than not.

Now he added the gesture of rubbing against her leg and dancing in front of her when she carried out his plate. Finally Janine decided she was ready for her next move.

I watched while she slowly moved her hand toward him. He sniffed cautiously at her fingers and did not move when she patted his enormous head. He allowed her to scratch his ears and chin.

Janine, I thought, had won. But suddenly Bones turned into a spinning ball of fur, hissing and striking out in all directions. However, instead of snatching her hand away from the onslaught, Janine drew it slowly out of range. I set up a first-aid station and unrolled more adhesive tape. Considering the number of daggers that Bones had thrown at her, Janine had come out of the fray easily, with nothing worse than several ticktacktoe games registered on the back of her hand.

I advised her to give up and forget about Bones—although I admit that I was disappointed. Whatever good will he had for Janine seemed to have vanished, and he was back to where he started.

She simply began all over again, following the same routine with his feeding, making only the slightest efforts to

touch him. Once more Bones calmed down and once more Janine repeated the course.

Bones, however, was truant a good part of the time. He had never accepted our original invitation to come indoors. I was just as glad; by size and temperament, he seemed to be quite capable of assassinating all of us in our beds, putting our house to the torch, and hoisting the Jolly Roger from the chimney. He preferred the outside and often disappeared for days on end. I did not know where these raiding excursions led him; more than once I was sure he had been scuttled and I gave him up for lost.

He came back to port, sometimes with fur missing or a network of slashes around his face. Janine was still not able to handle him and give him more than a sprinkling of disinfectant for his injuries.

But she always made sure a plate of food was available for him and, whenever Bones was in the neighborhood, he made a snug harbor in the empty doghouse; he stretched out there, almost filling the little cubicle, his ropy tail coiled neatly, his paws folded in front of him, and watched us greedily.

Now, seeing Janine, he rubbed against her and purred heavily whether or not she carried food. Once again, he allowed her to pat his head and ears; he flexed his muscles with appreciation when she stroked his back.

Once, while she talked to him, he made a sudden move —remembering the last time, I expected him to pull a few knives out of his sleeve. Instead, he dropped to the grass and rolled over like a kitten, waving all four paws in the air. This demonstration lasted only a second or two. Bones, as if suddenly realizing who he was, got to his feet again and shook himself. But I knew he had made an honorable surrender.

From then on, Janine could do as she pleased with him. Back from one of his expeditions, he sat patiently while she extracted burrs and thorns.

"And so, Rainette," Janine said, "he is almost civilized. But sometimes I thank it was much easier than trying to civilize you."

Through his own choice, Bones never became an inside cat. As much as he liked Janine, he preferred to make his own voyages. At home, he treated our cats with politeness, but if he found a strange one lurking in the bushes, he drove him away with frightful yells and the encouragement of a well-directed smack. To this extent, Bones was rather intolerant—but I could not really blame him. He had found his own secret cove, a private anchorage he could rely on.

If he restricted his contacts with humans to Janine and me, I believed it only made him all the fonder of us. In time, he even allowed me to pat him and occasionally he played with the long twig I pulled through the grass for his amusement. I knew that he would come back—when he was hungry or cold; when the burrs he collected during his rambles became intolerable, and he wanted them picked off; when he was rain-sodden or hurt. I did not know whether he planned eventual retirement in his harbor, or whether he hoped to roam until his legs grew too stiff to carry him. Very likely he would come back, one day, to die.

Yet, at each return, I knew that he would be coming back not to me—but to Janine.

# CHAPTER 22

I looked forward to a peaceful summer. My mail had dwindled to the usual bills and advertisements—Dennis, home on furlough, had eloped with Bianca; I suspected Janine's hand in some of this, but I had no evidence. Nor did I want to find any. I was ready to enjoy the weather from a hammock when Janine mentioned something I had forgotten completely. I felt like Faust confronted with an overdue contract—or, worse, as if the bank had suddenly decided to call in my mortgage.

"Rainette," Janine said, "you promised to teach me how to conduct." I knew she did not refer to music.

The man is fortunate who marries a wife with a sizable dowry, or an ability to cook, or even a love of housekeeping; but these advantages are trivial compared to a woman who can drive a car. Janine could not. An incomparable carpenter, painter, and animal tamer, she was less than an amateur when it came to automobiles.

"You said," she went on, "you would teach me as soon as the weather was nice."

Looking at the cloudless sky, the flowers blooming gently in the garden, and feeling the summer breeze on my face, I shuddered. I tried to make excuses—it was too warm, the carburetor would overheat, the air in the tires might expand dangerously. Feeble attempts. Janine's learner's permit arrived a few days later.

We set aside an hour every evening, when I drove the Model A far beyond the neighborhood limits. I demonstrated how to turn the key, adjust the spark and choke, the location of the gears. "There," I said, "I have kept my promise and shown you how to drive."

Janine would not allow me to escape through a grammatical loophole. "No," she said, "that is not enough. Now I conduct it myself."

Teaching a woman to drive was a standing joke on television; a marital pitfall according to the Sunday supplements; *Home Glamour* considered it an enchanting way for young people to develop common interests. No matter how I looked at it, I realized it was a critical point of some kind and tried to prepare myself. I had managed to come through the ordinary crises of my life with Janine. This one was complicated still further by the language—hers as well as mine.

"The kloosh, the brek, the guess . . ." Janine repeated.

Aside from pronunciation, she learned the names easily enough. The only source of trouble was the fact that she applied them to the wrong things.

"*Ah, oui, le . . . kloosh!*" Janine said happily while she stamped the gas pedal and the Model A lunged, chattered, and strangled to a halt. Afterward, she was angry at me. "I cannot learn these American names," she protested. "They have no sense: kloosh—that is to hold something; brek is what happens to the dishes when you dry them; and the guess comes from the stove."

I tried to expand my limited French automotive vocabulary with the help of my dictionary. The words were there —in a variety of synonyms. They gave no clue as to how the average French motorist would use them, and Janine could give me no help as a technical adviser.

Above the rattling and bouncing of the old Ford, between moments when I seized the wheel to pull the car away from the sidewalks and when Janine let go of the wheel altogether, I called out instruction in a gibberish surpassing anything created under Janine's Law:

"*Mettez* the clutch in! . . . *embrayage!* Now, *accélérez* . . . the gas . . . change the *vitesse* . . . the brake, *le frein.*" And it was always too late for the brake.

"You are talking like a Spanish cow," Janine said. "I do not know whether you are saying the words in English or French; it does not astonish me that I make no progress."

When we finally adopted a standard pidgin-nomenclature, Janine turned critical of the Model A. She was certain a newer car would be easier to drive; even though I showed her the secret combination I used to start the motor, she laid the entire blame on the ancient vehicle itself. I allowed that she might be right. Instead of its usual goggly grin, the front bumper—where Janine had drifted into the corner of a brick wall in a way I never did figure out—turned down in a spiteful, malicious expression; the dented fender looked like a cauliflower ear; the radiator had a definite sneer. Perhaps it duplicated my own attitude.

Jack and Joe's Driving School advertised not only road training but indoor practice on special machines. The school also guaranteed that their students would pass the state examinations. To spare my car and save our marriage, I offered to pay for Janine's lessons. I hated to take the money from our Paris fund, but unless I did, I feared that if we ever did get to Paris, it would be on separate boats.

Janine went to school enthusiastically. At night, instead of theoretical hairdressing, we now studied the vehicle code. It had been years since I had taken my driver's test, and I knew none of the answers. Janine did. She knew the legal speed limits on highways and secondary roads, the insurance laws, the distance required for a car traveling at forty miles an hour to stop on a sheet of ice.

"You see, Rainette," she said, "you are not such a good driver after all."

According to Janine, her progress at the driving school was *formidable.* The teachers were much more patient than I, their cars were newer and better, and the whole business was nothing but fun. A different viewpoint existed, however; I sensed it when the telephone rang one night and I heard a weary voice at the other end.

It was Charlie, one of the partners at Jack and Joe's. He had called to suggest that Janine might possibly do better at a school with more modern equipment. Their training machines had been built to stand a lot of wear—but not all at once.

"We have this movie comes on a screen," Charlie explained, "with a traffic scene. The learners work the pedals like they were driving; but this girl hits the brake so hard she knocks out the picture for everybody else. Is there something funny about your car or something she gets that from?"

I did not answer. "Listen, mister," Charlie went on, "if it's a refund you want . . ."

I reminded him of his school's guarantee. I had paid in advance, and Janine was now his problem. He hung up reluctantly. About a week later, Janine told me the wonderful news: she was ready to take the test for her license. Charlie was even going to let her use his own car.

The following afternoon she became a licensed driver.

"It was easy, Rainette. We drove up a hill and I had to stop, then start. And I backed up without hitting anything. Then we went around in circles and between a lot of poles in the ground. I answered the questions, and that was all. But really, Rainette, the agent who was sitting beside me in the car—I do not know how he could tell what my driving was like, because he kept his eyes closed all the time."

Knowing the state police to be above taking bribes, I was puzzled when Janine's license arrived in the mail, officially signed and presumably genuine. According to all the laws of the Commonwealth, she was now legally entitled to drive. She chose to exercise that privilege immediately.

The day was July Fourth, and I warned her about the local parade. I thought it better to wait until all the celebrations were over. Janine insisted on driving to my parents' house early in the morning, coming back before any parades started.

The outgoing drive was uneventful. She sat rigidly, and held the wheel at arm's length, stalling the Ford only twice. We were not bothered by cars passing us, since Janine maintained, in the interests of safety, a slow, careful pace in the middle of the street. Before the return trip, I checked the time closely to give her plenty of leeway. Even so, at her rate of travel we approached our house with no more than minutes to spare. Behind us, I could hear the drum and bugle corps, and I asked her to stop and let me drive. Janine, tight-lipped, shook her head. She stepped on the gas and swung around the corner of our street.

Teddy, usually locked up on Fourth of July, must have slipped his leash. At the sound of the Ford, he raced toward us, snapping, yelping, bristling to join combat with his old enemy. I shouted at him but he paid no attention; Janine, spinning the wheel like a croupier at Monte Carlo, headed

into the elm. Teddy ran down, shouting his victory cry. He danced around the car, howling at the smoking radiator. All his months of ambush had borne fruit in his day of joy.

Before we could get out, the local bus turned the same corner; dodging Teddy and the Ford, it jumped the curb and blocked most of the narrow street.

The parade was on us by this time. Unhesitating, the drum and bugle corps split in two files and marched around us. They were followed by the high-school band, the firemen's band, and the string band from the Ukrainian-American Society. In the high cab of the Model A, my ears rang with the blasts of trombones, cornets, tubas, the tinkling of glockenspiels, rolling waves from the bass drums; I could not even stand up when the flag passed by.

"*Tu sais,*" Janine said reflectively, "I have been thanking about these American automobiles, and all the traffic on the streets. I have decided, what I rilly would like is a bicycle."

The Model A was repaired, but it was never quite the same after that. Its spirit gone, the old Ford seemed brooding, listless, and went into a gasping stall each time we approached Teddy's corner. Janine, as she had threatened, bought a secondhand bicycle from one of the O'Reilly girls and she used it going back and forth from the mill. Since Fourth of July, she had lost her taste for driving. For that I was thankful—but the minute she left the automotive field, she took up another type of risk: the stock market.

I cannot be sure, but I believe the carnival that visited our neighborhood every summer was the deciding factor. The carnival set up for business on a vacant lot near Goozik's Hotel. For three days we heard the tootle of the calliope and from our lawn we could see the flashing arc of a Ferris wheel. Janine rode the small merry-go-round, but

she refused to have anything to do with the Ferris wheel. At the wooden booths scattered around the lot, she chucked baseballs at pyramids of wooden bottles, pegged darts at balloons—without success. Her luck changed at the wheel of fortune.

There, after the fifth try, her number came up. The prize, a bottle of sherry the color of old licorice water, was worth about half what it cost to get, but Janine carried it away in triumph. "I have the sense for these things," she told me. "It is too bad the carnival goes so soon . . ."

From then on, convinced of her powers, she became a willing customer for lottery tickets, drawings, raffles, or chances. Almost everyone in our neighborhood sold tickets of one kind or another—for church benefits, the Ukrainian Club Rebuilding Fund, veterans' funds, and what have you. Janine's top bureau drawer filled up with stubs that could have swamped us with deep freezers, automobiles, smoked hams, airplane trips, and outboard motorboats. We escaped the danger of overcrowding because Janine never won, but this did not discourage her. If anything, it inspired her to seek wider fields.

"This sock market which your father finds so passionating," Janine said. "Is anyone permitted to enter?"

Ordinarily I would have told her that in America only millionaires were allowed to buy shares; the truth of the matter was that I had been thinking about the market myself. This was the first time we had had any money ahead; a small investment might be just the thing to bolster our Paris fund.

I asked my father's advice on the stock market. He was more than willing to give me the benefit of his experience. He told me to stay out.

"But that is *ridicule*, Janine said. "All we need to do is choose the sock that only rises more than the others."

I warned her that a stock that went up quickly might go down just as rapidly.

"*Eh bien*," she said, "then we must buy socks only in your best companies."

Those, I told her, were not only the most expensive but least likely to move in either direction. Most people bought them because of the dividends.

"*Alors*, it is very simple. We buy the one with the biggest dividends."

"But those go down faster than the ones that pay small dividends."

"Ah, Rainette," Janine said impatiently, "if the best socks are the ones that pay the least and cost the most and the worst are the ones that pay the most and cost the least; and the dividends that cost the most are smaller than the ones that cost the least, then there is no sense at all in your *bourse*. But do not be worry. I will find the very sock we need."

Over the days that followed, I studied market reports and watched the financial columns. I charted the progress of a few stocks that interested me—but it was a waste of time. Janine had already decided what we wanted: Dagobert Disinfectants. I had never heard of such an organization and asked why she chose it. She gave me two excellent reasons.

"It has a French name," she said, "and it was a bargain, the lowest price of all."

Janine had a peculiar way of making everything logical. If the stock went up, we would make a lot of money; if it went down, it hadn't cost much in the first place. Thus, we couldn't lose. I gave in, but when I told my father what we planned to buy, his expression was the same as when I told him about our new house. Using his brokerage facilities, he bought the stock for us. Later, he confided that he had been

tempted to get something else and had to fight off his impulse. Experience, he decided, could only be won through suffering. From what he could see of Dagobert Disinfectants, we could expect to be wealthy—if not in pocket, at least in wisdom.

Dagobert, unchanging for months, became active a few days after we bought it. It went down. In a little while, it became even more active by going down further. I could not understand how a stock costing so little could fall so much. Yet its current market price was relatively high—as I learned when I received the certificates and saw a par value of ten cents.

Janine was very angry at Dagobert. "What do you mean?" she cried when I told her that the stock was worth a third of what we paid. "It is not reasonable! You must send a letter immediately; tell them we have changed our minds and please return the money."

Now we read the financial pages as if the world's economy depended on the disinfectant market. Dagobert achieved a new low and stayed there.

"*C'est le krach!*" Janine wailed. "These are the great days of 1929!"

In spite of everything, Dagobert continued to send out voluminous reports, circulars, and cheerful letters to its stockholders. According to these, Dagobert had never been in better condition; the company was expanding, profits had never been so high. Janine puzzled over these statistics and compared Dagobert's glowing self-portrait with its position on the board.

At last she found the answer. "*Tiens,*" Janine said as we studied the auditor's report, "here . . . they gain so much on one side, but on the other they spend the identical amount."

I told her that it was good to have a balanced budget.

"Balanced!" Janine cried. "That is *exactement* the trouble. It does not astonish me that poor Dagobert does not rise."

When the proxy statements arrived, Janine grew even more indignant. "*Quoi!* Now this Dagobert asks us to vote for someone we have never seen—and worse, to sign a paper so that a stranger does it for us! *Ah, ça* . . . you Americans speak always of the vote, and then you give it away to this . . . this . . . proxy!"

Janine, I pointed out, was welcome to attend the stockholders' meeting—taking place, unfortunately, about three thousand miles away.

"*Ah, non!* To make the voyage like that is impossible. It is all part of their plan. *Voilà*, I shall not vote at all! Not for proxy or anyone else!" Janine tore up the signature card and threw it in the wastebasket.

I preferred not to believe that Janine's action would effect Dagobert's board of directors. Yet, a few weeks later, the stock actually rose a point. At that time the entire market was higher than it had ever been, so I imagine that Dagobert was dragged along in spite of itself.

When the stock reached what we had paid, Janine wanted to sell. I wanted to hold on. I pleaded with her for a week—during which time Dagobert rose higher. I gave in at last. I reluctantly told my father to sell out. He telephoned me later.

"I don't understand," he said. "The market was up all day. But as soon as I got rid of the shares, everything suddenly went down."

In the final count, we actually made a profit from Dagobert—a little more than if we had speculated on U.S. postage stamps.

"It all goes to show you, Rainette," Janine said, "that I have the instinct for these things."

I was about to contradict her when I noticed that Dagobert had dropped again, far under its lowest price for the year. I hoped Janine would buy no more stocks. I doubted that the national economy would stand it.

Our financial crisis was at an end, but somehow Janine missed the prospectuses and reports; she looked wistfully in the mailbox to see if any more proxies had come in.

"It is, *quand même*, exciting to buy the socks," she said. "But next time I will choose more carefully. Rainette . . . is the uranium good? The newspapers are always talking about this uranium to make atoms; I think we can get the bargain in uranium now."

Janine showed me some prospectuses for an Alaskan uranium mine. They had come in the mail without her having to ask for them; that alone was a lucky sign. The company offered magnificent opportunities for growth, for long- or short-range capital investments. The price was only five cents a share. I promised to study them. While Janine was out of the room, I put them in my pocket.

Later, when I was sure she was not looking, I went outside to the incinerator and burned them up, stirring the ashes carefully for a long time.

# CHAPTER 23

That winter seemed the longest I had ever known. The snow began early, a dry powder that swirled over the knotted ground and spiraled through the naked branches of the maple tree. Then the flakes turned jagged and drifted in deep, smooth waves across the lawn. Once we got up to find the mulberry trees encased in a brilliant sheath of ice. The starlings had returned; their tracks made a delicate criss-cross against the whiteness. Our cats mainly stayed inside, crowding a window to look at the birds, while Bones kept on with his travels. For a month and more, the snow never entirely melted; even in sunlight, it lay in splotches over the dead grass.

Janine complained that the Philadelphia weather was ruining her sinuses; I caught three colds in rapid succession and was given the garlic treatment. The only good thing about the winter was the fact that it would probably be our last one in America.

We had given up our regular financial meetings, and for a while I had not kept too close a track on our Paris fund. When I did check into it, adding some book royalties,

Janine's recent raise at the mill, plus an estimated profit on the house, I found we should have enough for the trip—with an extra amount allowing us to stay in Paris until I could discover some way to earn a permanent living there.

When I told Janine the good news I expected her to laugh, cry, or jump around the room. Instead, she looked quietly at the figures on the sheet of paper and gave a half-smile.

"It has been a very long time, Rainette."

For a moment I was a little disappointed. She had shown more enthusiasm for less cause—at a Christmas tree, a snowman, the arrival of a seed catalogue. Yet, as she stood at the window, I realized that going back to Paris had not been a game for Janine, as it had sometimes been for me. I remembered how often I had thought of her as being half a child, that her sacrifices had been almost like an amusement for her, and Paris was a vague goal she did not take quite seriously.

Now I saw her in a rather different light: as a woman who had waited—patiently or impatiently—to go back to where she had been born, to a country entirely hers and only partly mine; not a child, but a woman who had lost her own child. I could not say that she had aged. In appearance, she had not changed since our first meeting—I noted an exception, for I had just begun to forgive her for cutting her hair short—perhaps the shadow of a line on her forehead, a small and evidently permanent callus on the palm of one hand, the result of her never-finished carpentry.

"*Très bien*," Janine said at last. "Now we must start our preparations."

Her excitement, which had been lacking since I first told her the news, came back redoubled. My work table was even less private property than it had ever been. Janine

appropriated it to write letters to her mother, her brother Georges and *la cousine* Yolande. Each day she turned out such a volume of correspondence, continuations of previous letters, revisions, amendments, and afterthoughts that I began to feel our Paris fund would be used up in stationery and postage.

The answers came back quickly enough, and all of them said the same thing. It was practically impossible to find a reasonably good, reasonably inexpensive apartment; since the war, conditions had barely improved. If we were willing to double up with her relatives, arrangements could surely be made. But neither Janine nor I liked that idea; we were too used to our own house, and I could not imagine life with a set of French in-laws would be any calmer than life had been with my own family.

Janine's brother turned up a small apartment in one of the drab neighborhoods that formed a belt around the city. It was pleasant enough as he described it, but unfortunately it had no heating or plumbing arrangements to speak of. *La cousine* Yolande knew someone who would sublet a place for a couple of months, in an ideal location on Avenue Victor-Hugo. The drawback here was that we would not be able to keep it very long before starting house-hunting all over again.

Janine thought about this one for a while. It would not be too far from her old home, from shops and theaters. "*Les grands boulevards!*" she murmured, "the fountains—but not the soda kind."

At first she decided to write to her cousin, but in the end she changed her mind. "It is very nice to live in Paris," Janine said, "but now I think I would like something with a garden, just a little *terrain*."

We began renegotiations, this time through one of Janine's uncles, who lived three or four miles beyond the

city. There the housing problem was not quite so difficult. Uncle Marcel wrote that we could rent a few rooms in a small country house; it had the usual heating and plumbing inconveniences, but there were trees and plenty of room for gardening. It would be vacant in several months, and he asked us to let him know as soon as possible, so that he could start making arrangements.

The photograph he sent showed a white stone cottage that seemed pleasant enough. At least it was a beginning. Janine wrote and told him we would probably take it as soon as our own affairs could be straightened out.

Another problem—one which had multiplied over the past year—centered around the cats.

"We cannot leave them!" Janine cried. "But on the boat —if they become seasick . . ."

I told her they would have to take their chances along with the rest of us; and they would probably stand the voyage better than she.

"And we must also make the arrangements with Felix, so that he will feed poor Bones."

I agreed to take the matter up with Felix. Perhaps we might establish some kind of fund to assure Bones of his meals.

"It was very easy to arrive here," Janine said, "but it becomes most complicated to leave."

The final detail was the house. Mr. Dorbinder visited us again, looked the place over, and confirmed it was worth substantially more than we had paid. The season was in our favor, demand was high, and he could foresee no difficulties in selling the property.

A few days later, he tacked up a "For Sale" sign.

# CHAPTER 24

Janine declared war on the sign immediately. "It is so ugly," she said angrily, "and I do not like it sitting there on my house. Why is there need for a sign like that? It is worse than the American bullboards."

I reminded her that since we were trying to sell the house, the more people who knew about it the better.

"But it gives me the strange feeling, Rainette. If we are going to make the advertisement, could we not be a little more private?"

If the sign attracted no customers the first day, it brought Mrs. Lamotta, Bianca and Dennis, Felix, Garigs, Louie, and nearly everyone else in the neighborhood.

"It makes me very sad," Janine said. "I thank it would be better if we did not mention it at all."

Finally she took down the sign herself. By this time, word had spread throughout the mill.

"They are very disagreeable about it," Janine said. "The Man with the Hat called me specially to his bureau and told me he was sorry I was going. And Eddie said the same

thing, and even Outhouse Charlie. He wanted me to know that he was no longer angry because I punched him on the nose."

I did not see how this could be called disagreeable behavior.

"*Eh bien,* it is disagreeable," Janine wailed. "Because I am the one it makes feel disagreeable. I knew in the beginning we should not have said anything."

Moving out of the neighborhood was something that could not really be kept a secret, I told her. Besides, it should make no difference, since we would not be seeing them again.

"*Quand même,*" Janine said, "it would have been better to move quietly and send post cards later."

The absence of the sign did not affect Mr. Dorbinder's own activities. Within a few days he brought around several prospects; the first, a dour-looking couple—the man tall, thin-lipped; the woman resembling a Boston terrier. Janine and I sat in the workroom while Mr. Dorbinder toured the house with them. I recalled how often we, as house-shoppers, had done the same thing; I wondered if the sellers had experienced the same resentment that I felt now. Our tenants were gone for the evening, and we could hear the footsteps of strangers above us. Janine sat wordlessly until Mr. Dorbinder came downstairs again. We gathered in the living room for a moment.

The thin-lipped man shook his head. "Siding's bad, you know," he said. "Looks like you'll have to replace it in a couple of years. And about that cellar . . . there hasn't been any rain for two weeks; where's the water come from?"

Janine was about to speak when the woman joined in:

"Well, the thing I didn't like, Horace, was the closets. They're so skimpy . . ."

"Of course, the house is old," the dour man said. "Most likely those closets had to be put in later. On top of that, I think the whole frame has sagged. Some of those doors hardly open and once they get open, they don't always close."

Hands behind his back, he paced solemnly across the floor like an undertaker. The boards creaked embarrassingly beneath his feet. "Take a lot of money to put this in any kind of shape," he said with a grimace.

Inwardly I grimaced too, and began to feel that Mr. Dorbinder had been much too optimistic. From the way things were going, we would be lucky to sell the place at all, not to mention any kind of profit.

"I don't know anything about the inside, Horace," the woman said, "but that shack outside is going to fall down any day. That's all right, though, because we'd want to knock it down anyhow and put up a garage."

"That's one thing I don't mind telling you," Horace said. "You've got a pretty nice spread outside. Shouldn't be too hard to cut a driveway in from the street, bring it right around to the door. Only thing, get rid of a couple of trees, and that might run into money."

He continued his pacing. "These people you got upstairs," he asked, "ever give you any trouble? Pay their rent on time?"

How, I wondered, would I be able to explain about the flexible situation with our lodgers? As newlyweds, they had expenses for furniture and they were still paying off their car. Of course the rent was late sometimes, but it always got straightened out eventually. In addition, they were expecting a baby, and I had planned, as a surprise present, to give them a month's rent free. I could have told him all this, but I did not; I suspected it would sound distressingly unbusinesslike.

"They're very nice," I said. "We couldn't ask for better. After you live here for a while . . ."

The woman looked at me as if she wanted to wash her hands.

"That's not our idea," Horace said quickly. "We aren't buying the house to live in. It's an investment. Dorbinder here says that's the same scheme you people had."

Meanwhile, the woman had taken another tour around the kitchen. "I don't know, Horace. Are you sure you've gone over everything carefully? Look in here a minute . . ."

The next sound I heard was something like an explosion. Except for the French accent, I might have thought the water jacket had finally gone.

"Get out!" Janine cried. "Get out of my kitchen! Get out of my house!"

The couple looked at us in amazement. Janine switched into French. I did not know whether they had studied the language, but Janine's remarks were unmistakable. Mr. Dorbinder, Horace, and his wife left hurriedly. Later, Mr. Dorbinder called up to soothe Janine. He admitted the prospects had not been very tactful, but it had only been a maneuver to bring down our price. Now, although practically chased out at the end of a broom, they were willing to pay what we asked.

"No," Janine said, "we will not sell our house to them. I will not have them living here, even if they do not live here at all."

The next couple was inoffensive enough, but for some reason Janine did not find them *sympathiques*. One of them might have inadvertently expressed an anticat opinion; I do not know, but whatever it was, Janine made it sufficient grounds for turning down their offer.

But try as she would, she could find nothing objectionable about the prospects who followed. They were our own age,

pleasant, and friendly. They thought the house was charming, the grounds wonderful, and they had seen nothing they liked so well.

Afterward, when we were alone, Janine turned to me indignantly. "It does not astonish me they like the house. That is *exactement* why we cannot trust them. They are trying to rob us. Where can they get such a house for that price? And then they will laugh and tell all their friends how cheap it was and how they got a bargain. I knew there was something I did not like about them. We would be *fous* to sell at that price. No, if they want our house, they will have to pay more."

At Janine's insistence, I telephoned Mr. Dorbinder and told him the price had just gone up, sure that would effectively eliminate the prospects. A few hours later he called back:

"They're delighted," he said. "These people really want it and they were willing to go up. All we need to do is fill out the papers. They're ready to put down a deposit right now."

Janine bit her lip at this new development. If she seriously intended to get rid of them, I told her, we could raise the price again. But it was already a thousand dollars more than what we had expected, an unheard-of chance . . .

Janine burst into tears. "Oh, Rainette," she sobbed, "I do not care about the money now. There are too many other things. I am sure our cats will not want to move. And no matter what Felix promises, he will not look after Bones as I do . . .

"And the garden is just starting to be nice . . . and Bianca is going to have a baby and wants me to be godmother . . . and Outhouse Charlie said he would never make fun of me again . . .

"And there is so much that needs fixing, I wanted to

paint the porch this summer . . . and the seeds I ordered are just arriving . . . and there are all of the magazine subscriptions to finish—I am sure they will never send them to us, no matter what they said . . .

"Oh, Rainette, I do not understand how this happens, but I do not want to leave. Everything we have done so we could get away—the house, working at the mill—they do not let us get away at all. I do not know whether it is all your fault, Rainette, but I would not doubt it, and it is terribill!

"*Non,*" she said after a moment. "I have med up my mine. We are going to stay."

# CHAPTER 25

Since we had postponed our trip, the Paris fund melted quickly and ran off in various directions: a new stove to avoid the asphyxiation which had been a constant danger in our kitchen; a bathtub that did not have to be shored up with a block of wood; screens for the porch, and dozens of other repairs and replacements that suddenly became urgent. The Model A had gone into a steady decline, so I put it into honorable retirement and upgraded myself to a secondhand Austin, small enough for even Janine to drive. By the time we ended our buying spree, Paris was, once again, only a little closer than the moon.

"It meks no difference," Janine said. "Because, *après tout*, if we are going to live here, then we must stop living like savages."

She wrote to Uncle Marcel, telling him our trip was indefinitely postponed; to Georges and *la cousine* Yolande, suggesting it would be much easier for them to come and visit us. Then, foreign affairs concluded, we turned to domestic issues.

If we planned to stay, I suggested that Janine might want to become a citizen.

"*Ah, ça, je ne sais pas,*" Janine said. "I do not think my family would be content if I became a foreigner. I must thank it over for a while."

A few days later Janine asked, "Rainette, if I am a *citoyenne* does that allow me to vote?"

I told her it did.

"For the elephant?"

"Yes."

"And the donkey?"

"Yes," I said, "but not necessarily at the same time."

"*Quand même,* there is not much variety, is there? But if I am a *citoyenne,* the government would not defend me from visiting France some day?"

"No," I said, "you would have an American passport."

"*Alors,* then I would become another of the American tourists. *Ça, je ne sais pas.*"

After a while Janine returned to the subject. "*Eh bien,* what is necessary to be done to become a *citoyenne?*"

Janine being a war bride, naturalization would be easy enough. She would have to fill out certain papers, go through a waiting period, and take a short examination on the government and its institutions. After that, she would be ready for the oath of allegiance.

"This oaf of allegiance, then," Janine said, "it is very *difficile?*"

"No, it's actually very easy."

Janine thought for a few moments. "*Eh bien,*" she said, "then I will take the oaf of allegiance. Even if I become a foreigner in France, at least I will no longer be a foreigner in America."

We signed the preliminary papers, and the naturalization

bureau gave Janine a booklet to study. As usual, she took it to bed with her.

"But it is much harder than the license-driver," Janine said, poring over explanations of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. "Here there is the *le congrès, le président,* and *la cour suprême,* and if they want, they can all stop each other from doing these laws. I do not understand that so much, Rainette."

Trying to put it on simpler terms, I said, "Suppose I am the President . . ." I disregarded Janine's gesture toward her eye and went on: "And you are the congress. The supreme court can be . . . well, the supreme court can be Felix. Now, you decide you want to do something, so you prepare a law. But I decide you shouldn't do it and say no."

"Which is *exactement* what happens," Janine murmured.

"Now, if you insist, even after I say no several times, it becomes a law anyhow."

"Which is also *exactement* what happens," she said.

"But," I added, "here comes Felix and he decides your law is against the Constitution. Then you have to throw it out and start all over again."

"*Ah ça!*" Janine cried, "I would not support that!"

"Then you would have to change the Constitution."

She brightened. "*Alors,* that should not be difficult, if that is all there is to worry about; and you, Rainette, would still have to do what I say? *Très bien.* I see these United States do not have such a bad idea after all."

Janine grasped the remaining details of government with ease. "But it is the animals I do not understand," she said.

"Animals?"

"*Oui.* This elephant and donkey that I always see. These are the favorite pets of your Presidents?"

"Not exactly," I said. "It depends on who is President."

I tried to explain the Republicans and Democrats, but not only did I confuse Janine; I began confusing myself as well.

"*T'en fais pas,*" Janine said. "All you mean is that sometimes in *la Maison Blanche* there is an elephant and sometimes there is a donkey."

I told Janine she was correct, in a very general manner of speaking.

In addition to American government, Janine became interested in history. Years before, when we first arrived, I had tried to use Philadelphia's historical sites to tell her the story of the Revolution.

"But that does not count," she said, "because I was very unhappy then and I did not make any attention to you."

We began once more with the Liberty Bell, the Declaration of Independence, and Betsy Ross. We drove to Valley Forge and Washington's headquarters. Janine inspected the old cannon, the tiny cabins where Washington's troops had wintered.

"These must have been truly *des hommes braves,*" she said. "But, Rainette, there is one thing I cannot forgive you. You did not come and help us with our Revolution. When I stop to thank that my *arrière-arrière-grand'mère* had to storm *La Bastille* while yours . . . *eh bien,* if I know your family . . ."

"It's all right," I said, looking at Janine as she climbed to one of the cannon, "I'm sure your great-great-grandmother did perfectly well by herself."

From then on, Janine immersed herself in Colonial history. But her view of it was subtly different from mine.

"This poor Montcalm," Janine said, as we turned the pages of a book I had bought for her, "why could you not let Québec alone? Though I really cannot blame you this time. It is all the fault of the English.

"And here, Rainette!" she cried, "what is this? The French and Andian War! Do you mean the French were fighting the Andians?"

"No," I said, "the Indians and French were on the same side. The Americans were fighting against both of them."

"*Enfin,*" she said, with a hard glance at me, "at last you admit it."

Paul Revere, because of his ancestry, came in for her special attention. "*Quand même,*" she said, "it is easy to see that when anything of importance had to be done, it was a Frenchman who did it."

For Janine, the high point of the Revolution was Benjamin Franklin's trip to Paris. But she grew indignant when I laughed at her impression of France's role in the destiny of the Colonies.

"Aside from Paul Revere," I asked, "who was really the most important man in the Revolution?"

"*Le marquis de Lafayette,*" Janine answered promptly.

I conceded Lafayette out of courtesy to Franco-American relations. "But after him, who did most of the work?"

Janine nodded her head wisely. "Ah, Rainette, that is easy. You are only attempting to make the joke. I know the history even better than you. How can there be any question?" she said. "It was *le général Rochambeau!*"

I surrendered the American Revolution to France, and the War of 1812 to Jean Laffitte. The Civil War had less of a French flavor, but Janine made up for it by falling in love with Abraham Lincoln. "*Oui,*" she said, "although he is not French, he is *un grand homme.*" Our bookshelf soon filled with Lincoln biographies, collections of pictures; Janine became reluctant to change five-dollar bills.

Late in the fall, we made an excursion to Gettysburg and walked over the quiet fields. Janine visited the spot where

Lincoln had delivered the address; she looked at the Round Top and the grass-covered slope of Pickett's Charge.

"It is not difficult to understand," she said, "that other people could be angry with the Americans before they got to know them. But for the Americans to be angry with each other, that is *dommage*."

As Janine's Law demolished the English language, Janine's interpretation of history raised similar havoc. American history stretched in a vast panorama, dominated by Lafayette, Rochambeau and Laffitte; by Père Marquette and La Salle; Frémont and Beauregard; Thoreau, Audubon, and E. I. du Pont de Nemours. And, weaving its way throughout, was a caravan of elephants, donkeys, and bull moose.

"Now, Rainette, I am ready for my oaf of allegiance."

I was sure the naturalization bureau could expect an interesting session.

Janine has not been back to France since our marriage. Now and again our friends on vacation abroad send picture post cards of the Arch of Triumph. Janine, who once saw it every day of her life, still looks at it eagerly. "There, Rainette," she will say, "is where I used to live." But, among the crowded avenues that radiate from the arch in a great star, even Janine is not always sure which tiny spot or reflection of a window marks her home.

We have talked of Paris again and again, and perhaps one day we shall visit there. So far, there has always been something to delay us—a kitten to raise, a new tree to plant, a garden that cannot do without her for a month.

Our Paris fund has never been reinstated, although Janine has been occasionally tempted, and her moments of homesickness have never entirely vanished. In her early days, a

French movie or a suddenly remembered melody was enough to put her in tears. A traveler on the way to or from Paris was something to be avoided, and a conversation with anyone even remotely French could easily lead to a catastrophe of nostalgia.

But, not long ago, a friend of ours sent a young French girl to visit us. She, too, had married an American; she had been in the United States about three months and could not wait to get back. Ordinarily, Janine would have agreed with her. Instead, as a citizen in good standing, an expert on elephants and donkeys, Janine took a more philosophical attitude.

"It is a bizarre nation," she said. "The Americans keep their houses very hot, but put ice in everything they drink. They are interested in *la politique*—the elephants and donkeys I will explain later—but it is difficult to make them vote. The *femmes américaines* have many people on the balcony, but for the rest of it they must make the diet.

"*Quand même*, after a certain length of time it is possible to accustom oneself. Besides, except for the Andians, sooner or later, everyone turns out to be a foreigner too!"

Afterward, Janine seemed vaguely troubled. "Do you remember, Rainette, long ago when that Frenchwoman came to see me? She sounded so droll when she was speaking French. Yet the girl who was here told me that I, too, had a strange pronunciation. Is it possible that I speak now with the American accent. That would be terribill. But at least," she added, "I have not become fat!"

Watching Janine and her French visitor, I, too, realized a subtle difference in their speech and gestures. For all their similar French intonations and movements, they were still far apart.

Janine's conversational gestures I knew so well had not been quite as quick or automatic; there was a fraction of a

second's pause to find the French word which had strangely escaped her.

How much she has changed I cannot accurately measure or balance, even in the superficial things. She is still not quite convinced that Chicago is reasonably free of gangsters. However, she does not expect to be scalped by an Indian waiting around the corner. She has come to terms with scrapple, breakfast cereal, and hot dogs—as long as I call them frankfurters.

On every Mardi Gras, Janine used to cook *crêpes* and, following tradition, hid one in the kitchen. Since the arrival of our cats, she has given up the custom; but on each first of May she has never failed to give me a bouquet of lilies of the valley. She prefers riding a bicycle to driving a car. To Janine, the businessman's lunch is only a little short of capital crime—but she is developing a fine technique with a can opener. She has become an admirer of the triple-decker sandwich, of milk shakes and soda; she is capable of serving a New England boiled dinner, preceded by *escargots bourguignons*. While Janine still ties a sock filled with garlic around her neck, she no longer objects on principle to penicillin.

Her motto is the French proverb *"Ce que la femme veut, Dieu veut"*—what woman wills, God wills—and she has followed it with perseverance and enthusiasm. Most of her opinions are based on whether something is *"sympathique"* or not. What this mysterious factor is, I have never been able to discover, and it has no resemblance to any known system of logic. But Janine understands it perfectly, and I suppose that is all that counts.

Which of Janine's attitudes are typically French or typically feminine, I cannot be certain. True enough, Janine could never hide her nationality. Her walk and gestures are unmistakable; even if she were to sit motionless and

silent, there would still be little chance of mistaking her birthplace.

But even without her accent, without this aura of Paris and of no other place in the world, Janine would still be different. As much as all of us differ one from the other, in whatever strange balance of joy, sadness, courage, anger, patience and impatience, so Janine is unique. Not because she is French—but because she is human.